MARVEL MASTERWORKS®

THE MIGHTY THOR®

VOLUME 19

THE MIGHTY THOR Nos. 291-302

ROY THOMAS & KEITH POLLARD

WITH RALPH MACCHIO & MARK GRUENWALD

MARVEL

MARVEL MASTERWORKS

PRESENTS

THE MIGHTY THOR

VOLUME 19

COLLECTING

THE MIGHTY THOR Nos. 291-302

ROY THOMAS • KEITH POLLARD

WITH RALPH MACCHIO & MARK GRUENWALD

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NOS. 291-302

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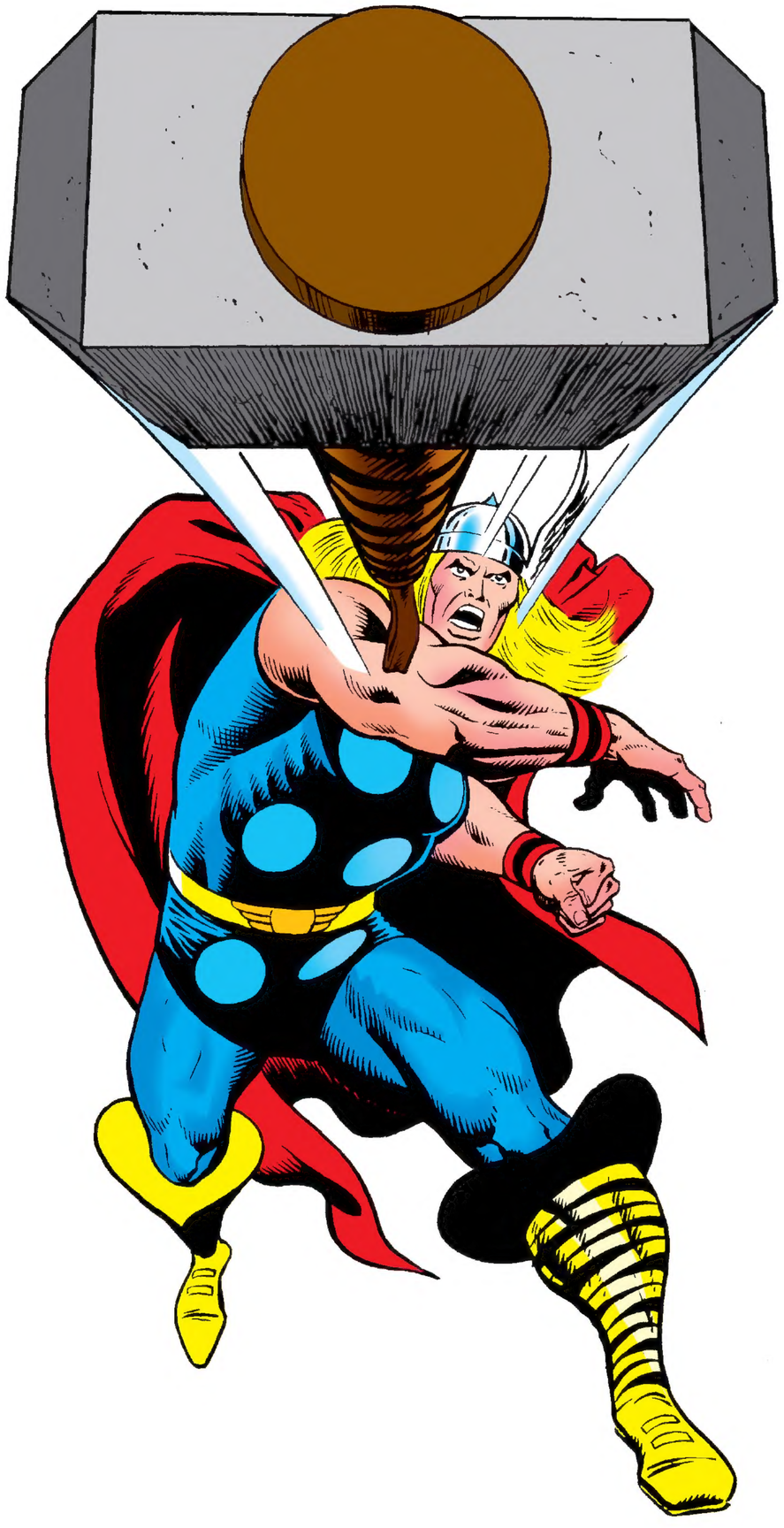

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CONTENTS

Introduction by Roy Thomas

Introduction by Ralph Macchio

The Mighty Thor #291, January 1980
"When Gods Have Joined Together!"

The Mighty Thor #292, February 1980
"If an Eye Offend Thee…!"

The Mighty Thor #293, March 1980
"The Twilight of Some Gods!"

The Mighty Thor #294, April 1980
"New Asgards for Old!"

The Mighty Thor #295, May 1980
"The Price--and the Pride!"

The Mighty Thor #296, June 1980
"From Valhalla--a Valkyrie!"

The Mighty Thor #297, July 1980
"The Sword of Siegfried!"

The Mighty Thor #298, August 1980
"Dragon's Blood!"

The Mighty Thor #299, September 1980
"Passions and Potions"

The Mighty Thor #300, October 1980
"Twilight of the Gods!"

The Mighty Thor #301, November 1980
"For the Life of Asgard!"

The Mighty Thor #302, December 1980
"The Shape of Things to Kill!"

INTRODUCTION
BY ROY THOMAS

The storyline of this *Thor* volume picks up where the last one left off.

The Thunder God and I (with considerable help from penciler Keith Pollard and inker Chic Stone) are still trying to integrate the cataclysmic cast of Jack Kirby's *Eternals* series into the wider Marvel Universe.

I'll be honest: I'm a bit foggier about the whys and wherefores of events in this volume than I am about the reasons I did certain things in "my" *Avengers* and *Conan* work of a few years earlier. It probably has something to do with youthful enthusiasm; I was in my twenties to mid-thirties when I fully engaged in the above two mags, and at this stage I was pushing 40. And, truth to tell, while I'd always loved Thor, I was never as enamored with writing his solo comic as I had been with the other two.

Still, given my admiration for the comic book Thor, and my love of myth and legend in general, I immersed myself in Norse, Graeco-Roman, and Kirbyesque mythology, and *Thor* #291 is where it all came together. Zeus' Olympus…Odin's Asgard…and Zuras' Olympia. I just pity poor Keith and Chic, who had to handle the artwork on that colorful cornucopia of classics-based characters! But neither ever flinched or complained. (Well, at least not in my presence!) As I said in my answer to a letter-writer that issue: After Ragnarok, Hyperion, the Eternals, the Celestials, etc., it was gonna be hard to go back to having Thor take the Cobra and Mr. Hyde too seriously!

Still, even amid all the pageantry and costumed multitudes, what really got readers' (and my own) blood racing was the personal drama—when, for example, at the end of #291, the now-one-eyed Odin is prepared to slay his fallen son because he has sworn an oath that cannot be denied. (SPOILER ALERT: He doesn't really kill Thor in the next chapter—but he comes darn close!)

After all the gods-infested doings of #291, it was a hoot to have Thor next take on nothing less than the long-lost Eye of Odin, albeit grown to gargantuan proportions. It amused me, too, because the second comics story I ever wrote—a *Blue Beetle* issue at low-budget Charlton in early 1965—had had a super hero battling the Eye of Horus, an Egyptian mythological entity. For me, it seemed, the Eyes had it!

Under the searing gaze of Odin's Eye, Thor relives his own past, and that of the Asgardians, all the way through the ultimate Ragnarok that had been delineated so beautifully by Lee and Kirby in *Thor* #127-128's "Tales of Asgard" backup. He sees his friend Balder (or at least someone with his name) rise from the dead to become one of the Nine Elder Gods in the Aftermath of the Twilight of the Gods, and he sees the origins of Odin, as time circles back upon itself to start the endless cycle of death-and-life-and-death all over again. But if you think I'm gonna wade through all that again to explain it to you—nope! Read the stories.

For me, it was an excuse to do something I'd wanted to do for a while. In *Thor* I'd explored several pet projects: the movie filming of Ragnarok (co-starring a second, red-haired Thunder God who more closely resembled the Thor of myth than the Lee-Kirby one ever did)…the merging of the worlds of Asgardians, Olympians, and Eternals…

…and now, *The Ring of the Nibelung.*

Ever since childhood, I'd been intrigued by mythology, and it seemed to me (as it once seemed to Lee and Kirby) that the Norse legends had gotten shorter shrift in popular culture than their Greek and Roman predecessors. While a high school teacher, I'd picked up a new translation of the libretto of Richard Wagner's four-opera cycle of the above italicized name, and had greatly enjoyed the German composer's approach to the Teutonic myths that were so closely related to the Norse. In late 1979 it occurred to me I could turn the *Ring* cycle into a story arc in *Thor*—with the thunderer playing the parts of two of the operas' heroes, Siegmund and his son, Siegfried.

The *Ring* cycle had it all: gods, heroes, dwarves, mermaids, giants—and a Ring of Power that I knew had been the ultimate inspiration for the one in J.R.R. Tolkien's three-volume *Lord of the Rings* masterwork that so many people had been smitten with for the past decade. (I myself liked Tolkien, but it was Wagner's *Ring* cycle and the authentic *Elder Eddas* and *Younger Eddas* of a millennium earlier that had truly won my heart.)

I had fun with our *Ring* adaptation. The valkyrie Brünnhilde, so central to Wagner's operas, Keith and I depicted in the image of the Valkyrie that John Buscema and I had come up with in *Avengers* #83 and which Steve Englehart and Sal Buscema had metamorphosed into a member of the Defenders. Once again, at the end of *Thor* #296, Odin was poised with his deadly trident above the fallen Thor, now representing the hero Siegmund. But this time, because my guide was Wagner and not Lee and Kirby, Odin *does* strike the fatal blow—so that it's left to Siegmund's son, Siegfried (yet *another* incarnation of Thor), to take up the mission, although he, too, was foredoomed in his turn.

Maybe, in the end, it was all a little too grim (and perhaps even a bit confusing) for a Marvel comic of 1980.

But, as it turned out…that was no longer my problem. Around Labor Day of '80, the second of my three-year writer/editor contracts with Marvel ended…and, since the then-current regime decided there'd be no more such, I declined to sign a writer-only contract, turned over all my Marvel assignments (lock, stock and Uru hammer) to others, and moved on to other fields for a half decade or so.

Fortunately, picking up the *Thor* gauntlet was Mark Gruenwald, who (with his friend and colleague Ralph Macchio) had contributed a few ideas to my 1979 run. Mark would carry on, beginning with #299, in which he generously gave me a splash-page nod…and, with the extra-sized #300, he and Ralph would team up to bring the *Ring* cycle to a close and tie it all in with the Celestials, perhaps even utilizing a suggestion or two I myself made with one foot out the door.

I had left *Thor* in good hands—those of Mark, Ralph and Keith—though not without a bit of regret, and now I could move on to conquer other worlds, or at least *try* to conquer them.

Each of us carries the baton as far and as skillfully as we can, then we pass it on to the next in line. Stan and Jack had begun the marathon—and all the rest of us, ever since, have simply been proud to be picked to carry it to the next runner.

So now I'll leave it to my friend and erstwhile editor, Ralph Macchio, to pick up the tale from here…

2019

Roy Thomas has been a writer and often editor in the comic book field since 1965, more often for Marvel than for anybody else—and that's the way he's more or less wanted it.

INTRODUCTION
BY RALPH MACCHIO

It is as much a privilege and pleasure to follow Mr. Roy Thomas in 2019 with this introduction as it was almost 40 years ago in the pages of *The Mighty Thor*. Roy did brilliant work on the Thunder God's title, and Mark Gruenwald and I, who were always a bit in awe of what he'd achieved at Marvel, were thrilled that he'd asked us to come along on the journey and assist him. Roy has already written about his departure from Marvel in his piece, so no need to rehash it here. We were much the poorer for his loss, and the task of winding up the sprawling Celestials Saga in issue #300 fell to neophyte scripters Gruenwald and Macchio.

The Big T had left us some strong suggestions as to the direction he saw the events proceeding, though no actual plot had been written. So the Gru and I reviewed where everything was as of issue #299. We took Roy's thoughts fully into account, mixed them with our own ideas and voilà—out came the plot for a special double-sized *Thor* #300 that not only resolved the Celestials storyline, but also finished the adaptation of Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung* story that had been so effectively woven into it. Whew! I'll admit it was a daunting undertaking, and we were already under a deadline crunch. However, for Mark and me, the resulting story was thoroughly satisfying. We felt we'd achieved what we set out to do and done it with enough verve and gusto that readers who'd been with the long storyline since its inception would feel rewarded they'd stuck around. Looking back on issues #300 and #301 from a four decades' later perspective, I still wouldn't change anything. It's one of those rare instances where a writer feels his efforts paid off. It worked.

Praise must go to our incredible artists on the book, penciler Keith Pollard and inker Gene Day. What a magnificent job those two gents did conveying the coruscating power of a literal clash between the gods and the Celestials. And it wasn't just the battle scenes they excelled at, because the poignant, personal moments of anguish and loss were also lovingly rendered. And here's an interesting behind-the-scenes anecdote. Although we had a longer page count to tell our tale than in a regular-sized issue, as the artwork began to come in from penciler Keith, we realized we simply didn't have enough pages to end this epic with the properly spaced cataclysmic crescendo we so desperately wanted. So rather than follow protocol and inform our long-suffering editor, Big Jim Salicrup, of our predicament, we simply called Keith Pollard up directly and had him expand sequences, adding pages where necessary to give the story the enormous scope it demanded. I still think it was worth the effort, and I hope my old pal Salicrup still feels the same. I have to tip my Asgardian helmet to him for allowing us two naughty boys to get away with it and not get our wrists slapped.

Although in his magnificent *Eternals* series Jack Kirby had the Celestial Arishem standing on his pylons in the Andes, prepared to wait 50 years to pass judgment on mankind, Mark and I decided to drastically accelerate that timetable. Our idea was that the elder Earth goddess, Gaea, would offer up twelve examples of the finest mankind had to offer and see if mighty Arishem would pass judgment and leave Earth in peace. Ending the threat to mankind posed by the Celestials was really at the heart of the saga. That threat also sparked an idea in me that Odin, having such a concern for his son's adopted planet and having actually married the Earth goddess in ages past, might have put a failsafe in place should things turn against humanity.

What could that failsafe be? I pondered this for a while—and then it hit me! The dread Destroyer, introduced way back in the mid-1960s in *Journey Into Mystery* #118, had been placed on Earth by Odin to deal with the final danger to the world, although Lee and Kirby had never specified what

that danger was. Well, it just had to be the Celestials. That just seemed right to me. Luckily, both Roy and Mark agreed, and we had another element in play. This gave Mark and me the chance to stage a huge battle sequence between the lone Destroyer, now animated by the spirit of Odin, against the assembled Celestial host! Now you're talkin'! We really had a blast writing the entire issue, especially that extended confrontation between the Destroyer and Celestials.

After all the pyrotechnics and wrenching emotional scenes in #300, there were still the cosmos-shaking repercussions to be dealt with. Thus, *The Mighty Thor* #301 became the issue-length epilogue. Thor and Mother Gaea had to contend with the tragic consequences of #300 as best they could. After the shattering climax of the previous issue, the pressure was on us to prove we weren't one-note wonders on this title, so we worked overtime to ensure this epilogue was no letdown. We needed to restore the status quo and tie up loose ends as entertainingly as possible. It was a real kick to have Thor visit a number of other pantheons and deal with their personalities and quirks.

Issue #302 offered its own special challenge. We decided not to be foolish and try to top ourselves with starting another cosmic storyline, so we went 180 degrees the other way. We introduced a small, bald-headed fellow who had developed the ability to conceive of perfect geometric shapes and then bring them into physical reality where he could mentally use them as weapons. Locus, as we called him, possessed the power of mathematics unleashed! It was a chance for Mark and me to catch our breaths while providing our Asgardian Ace with a truly bizarre Earth-born foe. I think you'll enjoy this break from all the literary heaviness of the previous issues as much as we did.

Well, after some 352 pages, the Celestials saga saw its completion. It was a massive labor of love. All the creators involved never lost sight of the goal: To tell the biggest darn Thor epic ever, encompassing immense otherworldly landscapes and vistas and eons of time. I'm proud to have been a part of the effort, as I know my late friend, Mark, would be too. Beyond entertainment, myths and legends exist to tell us the truth about ourselves, however uplifting or unpleasant, through the gift of story. I hope we succeeded in that endeavor here. Ultimately, no less than mighty Arishem himself, you Marvelites are the judge.

Enjoy,

Ralph Macchio

2019

Ralph Macchio's tenure as a Marvel Comics editor is second only to Stan Lee. Throughout his distinguished career he has guided the creation of iconic series including, Frank Miller's Daredevil, *Walter Simonson's* Thor, *the launch of the Ultimate Universe and adaptations of Stephen King's* Dark Tower *and* The Stand. *He has also written numerous titles, including* Marvel Two-In-One *and* Marvel Fanfare, *and trained generations of editors, including future editors-in-chief.*

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THE MIGHTY

THOR™

ODIN AND ZEUS --SIDE BY SIDE AGAINST THE *ETERNALS*-- AND *THOR*!

CAN EVEN A *THUNDER GOD* PREVAIL?

KEITH & BOB

When DR. DONALD BLAKE strikes his wooden walking-stick upon the ground, it becomes the mystic hammer MJOLNIR— and the lame physician is transformed into the Norse God of Thunder, Master of the Storm, Lord of the Living Lightning— and heir to the throne of eternal Asgard....

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR!®

ROY THOMAS WRITER/EDITOR * KEITH POLLARD & CHIC STONE ILLUSTRATORS * GLYNIS WEIN COLORIST * JOE ROSEN LETTERER * JIM SHOOTER CONSULTING EDITOR

WHEN GODS HAVE JOINED TOGETHER!

OLYMPIA... ASGARD... SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA: IN THE PAST 24 HOURS, EACH OF THESE THREE WONDER-LANDS HAS WITNESSED THE COLOR-SPLASHED FORM OF THE MIGHTY **THOR**, PROPELLED BY HIS ENCHANTED HAMMER, HURTLING THROUGH THE SKIES ABOVE IT.

AND NOW, THE GOD OF THUNDER HAS COME **FULL CIRCLE**, BACK TO--

OLYMPIA!

ALREADY CAN I BEHOLD THE *SHROUDING MISTS* WHICH HIDE ITS GLEAMING MOUNTAIN-TOP SPIRES FROM THE EYES OF MORTAL MEN.

IF ONLY *ZURAS*, CHIEF OF THE OLYMPIANS, HATH *KEPT HIS WORD*-- AND HELD BACK HIS FELLOW ETERNALS FROM ATTACKING THE *MOTHERSHIP OF THE CELESTIALS!*

LF 600

BUT *NAY!* HOW COULD I THINK, E'EN FOR A MOMENT, THAT ZURAS WOULD *DISHONOR* HIS SACRED OATH TO WAIT *ONE FULL DAY* BEFORE BEGINNING HIS ASSAULT ON THE SPACE GODS? *

STILL, THAT DAY HATH COME AND *GONE*...

*AS SEEN IN ISSUE *289. --ROY.

...NOR DID I LEARN AUGHT IN DISTANT *ASGARD*, SAVE THAT ODIN STILL HATH ME UNDER THE *BAN OF EXILE*...

...AND THAT E'EN MY BELOVED *SIF* HATH TURNED AGAINST ME!

WELL, IF THE *GODS* WILL NOT STAND BESIDE ME IN MINE HOUR OF NEED--

--MAYHAP YON *ETERNALS* BE MY FORE-ORDAINED ALLIES, AFTER ALL!

SO, ASGARDIAN, YOU HAVE RETURNED.

AYE, ZURAS... AND SADLY, WITHOUT WORD OF ANY *ALTERNATIVE* TO THINE OWN PLAN.

I COULD WISH IT HAD BEEN OTHERWISE.

NOW, HOWEVER, WE MUST BEGIN AT ONCE THE *RITUAL OF THE UNI-MIND*... FOR ONLY THUS MAY WE, WHO ARE THE *CREATIONS* OF THE CELESTIALS IN EONS PAST, HOPE TO GARNER POWER ENOUGH TO *CHALLENGE* THE GODS FROM SPACE.

YOU ARE *MIGHTIEST* OF THE ASGARDIANS AFTER ODIN, THOR; WILL YOU *JOIN* YOUR IMMORTAL STRENGTH TO OURS?

NAY, ETERNAL... I FEAR *NOT*...

FOR, THOUGH I WANT FULL MUCH AS YOURSELF TO STAVE OFF THE *FIFTY-YEAR JUDGMENT* WHICH THE CELESTIALS PLAN TO RENDER UPON THE EARTH FROM THEIR DOMED CITY IN THE FAR-OFF *ANDES*...

STILL, I STAND CONVINCED 'TIS NOT BY *DIRECT CONFRONTATION* THAT THEY WILL BE CONQUERED, IF AT ALL.

LIKEWISE, ERE I STRIKE OUT AT THEM, I WOULD FIRST LEARN THE SECRET OF THE *DREAD VISION* THE PRIME CELESTIAL DID SHOW UNTO ME:

THE SIGHT OF *ALL-FATHER ODIN* HIMSELF, BENDING THE ROYAL KNEE TO THE CELESTIALS *ONE THOUSAND YEARS AGONE!*

YET, I DID VOW TO ***STAND ASIDE***, IF I FAILED TO FIND ANOTHER COURSE OF ACTION -- THUS, IF I CANNOT ***DISSUADE*** YOU FROM YOUR PATH --

YOU CANNOT.

THEN DO AS THOU ***WILT*** -- AND I'LL BUT PRAY 'TIS THE ***RIGHT*** PATH.

*MOMENTS LATER, WITH UNACCUSTOMED PASSIVITY, THE ANGUISHED SON OF ODIN CAN MERELY STAND AND **WATCH**...*

*...AS THE **LAST** OF THE OLYMPIAN ETERNALS ARRIVES, SUMMONED FROM EXISTENCES ALL OVER THE GLOBE...*

*...TO SWIRL, LEVITATING LIKE WEIGHTLESS ANGELS, AROUND **ZURAS**, ELDEST OF THEIR KIND, AS HE INTONES THE **RITUAL OF THE UNI-MIND** FOR THE SECOND TIME IN A VERY FEW YEARS. **

ALL IS IN ***READINESS*** ONCE MORE, MY BROTHER ETERNALS.

THE MIND AND ESSENCE OF ***ZURAS*** REACHES OUT TO YOU.

COME TO ***ZURAS!***

JOIN WHAT IS ZURAS!

**SEE ETERNALS #12. --R.T.*

COME! COME --

-- AND JOIN!

*THEN, AS THE GLOWING BLUE-WHITE FLAME GROWS EVER STRONGER, **ETERNAL AFTER ETERNAL** SWOOPS TO VANISH INTO ITS RAVENING CORE...*

LET ALL THAT IS ZURAS BE ***OURS!***

LET ALL THAT IS OURS BECOME THE ***UNI-MIND!***

THEN, AS THE **FINAL** OLYMPIAN IS GONE FROM SIGHT, A NEW AND ENORMOUS **ENTITY** IS BIRTHED FROM FIRE AND FURY:

THE UNI-MIND!

AND, THOUGH MANY ON EARTH BEHOLD ITS GLOW FROM AFAR, ONLY **ONE** THERE IS WHO BEHOLDS THE THING ITSELF...

BY THE FLAMES OF MUSPELL-HEIM!

ALL THE ETERNALS BE MERGED TO-GETHER INTO A *SINGLE VAST ORGANISM*-- LIKE SOME GIANT, SENTIENT *BRAIN* THAT DOTH LEAP SKYWARD!

NEXT MOMENT, EVEN AS THOR GASPS, THE UNI-MIND **CASTS FREE** THE FEEBLE BONDS OF GRAVITY, TO STREAK INSTANTLY INTO ORBIT AROUND THE WORLD WHICH SPINS, UNSUS-PECTING, BELOW.

BUT, THOUGH THE WORLD WHICH THOR CALLS *MIDGARD* MAY BE UNAWARE OF THE UNI-MIND...

...THE **ONE ABOVE ALL**, LONE CELES-TIAL ABOARD THE SPACE GODS' MOTHER-SHIP, IS **NOT**.

GRIMLY, HE BRACES HIS TOWER-ING FORM FOR WHAT MAY WELL BE A **BATTLE** SUCH AS EARTH HAS NOT SEEN IN MANY AN EON.

FAR BELOW, HOWEVER, A GOLD-TRESSED ASGARDIAN SUDDENLY FINDS HIS ATTENTION **TORN** FROM THE HEAVEN-SPANNING GLOW...

FAITH OF THE VIKINGS! WHAT BE *THIS*??

A *NEW* GLOW-- FROM YONDER STRANGE *CLOUD* WHICH DOTH DRIFT EARTHWARD, AS IF FROM NOWHERE!

BE THIS SOME FURTHER MANIFESTATION OF THE *UNI-MIND*, OR--?

NAY, ARROGANT PUP! 'TIS NO MERE MERGING OF *ETERNALS* THOU NOW DOST FACE!

THAT *VOICE*! CAN IT BE?

HERE!? OF ALL PLACES IN THE VAST MULTI-VERSE--*HERE??*

ALL-FATHER **ODIN**-- SIDE BY SIDE WITH **ZEUS**, LORD OF IMMORTAL OLYMPUS!?

AND *MORE:* YE HAVE BROUGHT AN ARMY OF *GODS* AND *TITANS* INTO THE VERY STRONGHOLD OF *OLYMPIA!*

THERE BE *NO PLACE* ON EARTH THAT *ZEUS* MAY NOT TREAD, WHEN HE DOTH DESIRE TO DO SO, ASGARDIAN.

LORD ODIN! WILT THOU COMMAND THY SON TO STAND ASIDE THAT WE MAY BE ABOUT OUR BUSINESS HERE?

I HAVE *NAUGHT MORE* TO SAY TO HIM, LORD ZEUS.

THEN TELL *ME*, IF THOU WILT, MASTER OF OLYMPUS-- WHAT DOST THOU HERE, WHEN THE DENIZENS OF LIKE-NAMED OLYMPIA HAVE *DEPARTED* THIS MORTAL PLANE ON A MISSION OF URGENCY?

SPEAK-- FOR, I DO STAND AS *GUARDIAN* OF THIS CITADEL, TILL THEY WHO HAVE BEFRIENDED ME BE RETURNED FROM THEIR AWESOME JOURNEY.

THOU ART E'EN MORE AUDACIOUS THAN WHEN *LAST* WE MET, ODINSON.*

WE HAVE COME AT THY SIRE'S BEHEST, FOR A MOST *WORTHY* PURPOSE:

TO *LAY WASTE* THE CITY OF THE ETERNALS!

*SEE ANNUAL, STILL ON SALE.--R.T.

AND EVEN *THOU* AND THY LIGHTNING-HURLING *HAMMER* SHALL NOT STAY OUR DREAD HAND.

IF YE DO DESTROY OLYMPIA, YE WILL DO IT O'ER THE LIFELESS FORM OF *THOR!*

NOW, GET THEE *HENCE*-- YE TWAIN, AND ALL THY *MINIONS FROM OLYMPUS!*

I'LL NOT ASK YE *TWICE!*

DOST THOU *HEAR*, GREAT ZEUS? *SLAY* HIM NOW, AS THOU SHOULDST HAVE DONE LONG SINCE!

SILENCE, WAR-GOD! I AM CERTAIN THOR HATH *REASONS* FOR THAT WHICH HE DOTH.

MY THANKS, HERCULES. THOU WERT EVER *FRIEND*, SINCE THAT DAY WE DID BATTLE *PLUTO* IN THE HALL OF HADES ITSELF.

THAT FRIENDSHIP WILL NOT BEND MY WILL TO THINE, DEFIANT ONE. WITH THY *PERMISSION*, LORD ODIN?

AS THOU *WILT*, LORD ZEUS.

THEN-- *GODS AND HEROES OF OLYMPUS!* THOU KNOWEST WHAT MUST BE DONE!

AYE, LORD OF LORDS.

GODS AND HEROES: THOR RECOGNIZES BOTH AMONG THOSE HELMET, CORSELETED FORMS...

...WHICH NOW LASH OUT AT THE UNGUARDED TOWERS AND SPIRES OF OLYMPIA.

SMASH!

UNGUARDED, DID WE SAY?

--AND NOW, AS HEIMDALL'S KEEN EYES ARE MY WITNESS-- *YE SHALL!*

BASE VILLAINS!

I SWORE YE WOULD RECKON WITH *ME* IF YE WOULD WREAK HAVOC--

BY KRONOS' BOTTOMLESS MAW! VERILY, ASGARDIAN, I BE FORCED TO TEACH A *LESSON* INDEED TO THINE INSOLENT OFFSPRING, IF THOU WILT NOT-

NAY, LORD ZEUS.

THAT TASK BE *MINE* TO DO, AND MINE *ALONE!*

THUS, EVEN AS THE THUNDER GOD'S HAMMER BE POISED TO STRIKE AT THE INVADING HORDES--

AGES AGONE, I DID HUMBLE THEE BY SENDING THEE TO MIDGARD* IN A FORM BOTH MORTAL AND INFIRM.

LET THAT SAME SHELL OF FLESH APPEAR IN OLYMPIA!

WHAT--?

*MIDGARD=EARTH.--ROY.

GOOD LORD! I'VE BEEN CHANGED BACK-- INTO DR. DON BLAKE!

WELL, IT WON'T WORK, FATHER! AS SOON AS I STRIKE MY CANE ON THE PAVEMENT--

--'TWILL ALREADY BE TOO LATE, MY SON-THAT-WAS. LOOK TO THE SKY!

HUH? WHAT DO YOU--?

THE TOWER FROM WHICH ZURAS FORMED THE UNI-MIND-- IT'S SHAKING!

BUT-- THAT'LL PROBABLY WEAKEN THE UNI-MIND, JUST WHEN--

YES, DONALD BLAKE-- JUST WHEN THE GESTALT-LIKE ENTITY DRAWS NEAR THE CELESTIALS' HUGE STARSHIP!

THUS, AFTER A MOMENT'S FIERCE YET VAIN STRUGGLE--

--THE UNI-MIND BEGINS TO SINK SLOWLY BACK TOWARD THE EARTH SPINNING SO FAR, SO NEAR--

--TILL ITS MIND'S EYE LOOKS WITH LOATHING UPON THOSE WHO HAVE TRESPASSED UPON OLYMPIA'S SOIL.

BRACE YE YOURSELVES FOR A BATTLE BEYOND COMPARE, YE GODS AND HEROES!

NEXT MOMENT, THE STRANGE BEING DISSOLVES ONCE AGAIN INTO THE SIMPLER PARTS OF WHICH IT IS COMPOSED...

AND THERE IS NO MORE UNI-MIND IN FAIR, BESIEGED OLYMPIA...

...BUT REPLACING IT IS A PLURALITY OF DEMI-GODS!

WE HAVE BEEN STABBED IN THE BACK, ETERNALS.

BUT BY WHOM, FATHER ZURAS?

CAN THOSE TWO DOWN THERE BE WHO I THINK THEY ARE?

AYE, ETERNAL. NAMES TO CONJURE WITH-- OR NAMES TO CURSE:

ZEUS AND ODIN-- OVERLORDS OF OLYMPUS AND ASGARD, RESPECTIVELY.

AMAZING! WE ALWAYS KNEW THEY EXISTED, OF COURSE.

YET, TO ACTUALLY SEE THEM IN OLYMPIA--!

LONG HAVE WE STAYED IN OUR OWN TWIN SPHERES, BEYOND THIS MORTAL PLANE--TILL YE ETERNALS DID DEIGN TO CHALLENGE THE SPACE GODS THEMSELVES.

THAT, WE SHALL NOT ALLOW!

I PRAY, LET ME SPEAK, LORD ODIN.

THIS DOTH INTEREST ME, SINCE NE'ER BEFORE HAVE I BEEN CHALLENGED BY HIM WHO IS MY NAMESAKE.

WE'LL STAND IN YOUR SHADOW NO LONGER, ZEUS.

WE WANT PEACE WITH YOUR KIND, BUT NOT AT THIS PRICE.

WELL SAID, GREAT ONE! WE OF OLYMPIA ARE DOORMATS FOR NO MAN OR GODLING.

NOW, LEAVE THIS CITY, OR-- ;UNNNH!;

HE'S FALLEN! THE STRAIN OF HOLDING THE UNI-MIND TOGETHER-- COUPLED WITH THIS TREACHERY--!

"FATHER ZURAS" SHOULD PERHAPS BE CALLED GRANDSIRE, EH, LORD ODIN?

BY THE COSMOS, WE'LL BROOK NO INSULTS FROM THE INVADERS OF OLYMPIA!

FORWARD, ETERNALS! WE'LL THROW THE BLACK-GUARDS OUT!

WE'RE WITH YOU, IKARIS!

THUS IT **BEGINS**: ETERNAL VS. IMMORTAL--TITAN VS. MUTATE-- ONE BRAND OF **OLYMPIAN** AGAINST ANOTHER.

AND, FOR THE MOST PART, ONLY A VERY **WATCHFUL** OBSERVER COULD TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO RACE OF COMBATANTS.

BUT, HAS NOT **OUR** KIND EVER DONE THE **SAME**, O READER?

THOSE THINGS WHICH **WARS** ARE FOUGHT OVER EXIST, MOST TIMES, ONLY IN THE **HEARTS** AND **MINDS** OF THE ANTAGONISTS...NOT ON SOME VAST **SLATE**, SOMEWHERE IN THE COUNTING-HOUSE OF THE UNIVERSE.

STILL, A FEW FIGURES HANG BACK FROM THE FRAY: **ZEUS**, AND **ODIN**, AND FALLEN **ZURAS**...

...AYE, AND VALIANT **THOR**, WHOSE ASGARDIAN MIND IS BOGGLED, FOR ONCE, BY THE SHEER **MADNESS** OF THIS STRUGGLE AMONG THOSE WHO, HE FEELS, SHOULD RATHER **UNITE** AGAINST THE COMMON **CELESTIAL FOE!**

YET, WHILE BATTLE RAGES IN EARTHBOUND OLYMPIA, WHAT OF ASGARD, WHICH FLOATS SERENELY IN SOME DISTANT NETHER SPHERE?

NO! BY THE BEARD OF THE ALL-FATHER-- THIS CANNOT BE!

AND THOU SAYEST, LADY SIF, THAT YON SCENE IN THE ALL-SEEING EYE HATH STAYED NIGH UNCHANGED SINCE THOU DIDST FIRST BEHOLD IT?

AYE... IMPOSSIBLE THOUGH IT MAY SEEM!

I WANDERED HERE, TO FORGET THE HORRIBLE WRONG THAT I DID UNTO MY BELOVED THOR-- HURLING HIM FROM THE REALM WHILE IN THE METALLIC FORM OF THE INDESTRUCTIBLE DESTROYER--

--TO DISCOVER NEITHER NOBLE FRIGGA NOR THE NORN-QUEEN HERE--

--BUT ONLY THIS DREAD VISION:

GRIM HOGUN-- BRAVE FANDRAL-- AND VOLSTAGG OF THE VOLUMINOUS GIRTH-- ALL HELD IN FIRE-BONDAGE AND DEADLY PERIL BY THE ONE CALLED FAFNIR!

LONG HAVE THEY FOUGHT BACK 'GAINST HIS POWER-- BUT NOW THEY WEAKEN IN THAT FAR-OFF, UNKNOWN PLACE, AND SOON THEY MUST--

BUT HOLD! WHAT'S THIS?? YON KING-TURNED-DRAGON HATH BEEN SMITTEN MIGHTILY FROM SOME UNSEEN SOURCE--

THE HEADS OF THE WARRIORS THREE TURN IN AMAZEMENT--

--AND THEY BEHOLD FOR THE FIRST TIME THAT WHICH WE TOO DO SEE!

I KNOW THOSE TOWERING FORMS! I SAW THEM FIRST ON MIDGARD SOME TIME AGONE!*

THEY BE THOSE WHOM ODIN HIMSELF DID CAUSE TO BE CREATED-- THOSE WHOM HE DID CALL-- THE YOUNG GODS!

*SEE ISSUE #203. --R.T.

AS BACK IN THE REALM OF THE ETERNALS--

--THE INVADERS FROM OLYMPUS ARE FINDING THAT THESE OLYMPIANS, OF WHOM ZEUS HAS TOLD THEM SO LITTLE, CAN HOLD THEIR OWN EVEN AGAINST THOSE CALLED GODS.

AND, IN THE FORE-FRONT OF BATTLE--

THIS WAY, FORGOTTEN ONE! THY COUNTERPART AMONG THE BASE INTRUDERS STANDS DIRECTLY IN THY RAMPAGING PATH.

MY THANKS, SPRITE, FOR BEING MINE EYES!

WHAT? DID I HEAR SOMEONE DECLARE HIM-- MINE EQUAL?

YOU DID-- IF YOU ARE HERCULES, DEMI-GOD SON OF ZEUS.

I AM NONE OTHER.

THEN LONG HAVE I WISHED TO MEET YOU-- EVER SINCE I CLEANED OUT THE AUGEAN STABLES IN ANCIENT GREECE AND WAS THOUGHT TO BE YOU.

'TWAS THOU WHO DID THAT?

VERILY, THOU DIDST STEAL MY THUNDER THAT DAY-- AYE, AND ON MANY ANOTHER, I'LL WARRANT.

CALL THY-SELF THEN NOT "FORGOTTEN"-- FOR HERCULES HATH REMEMBERED THEE, FULL MANY A CENTURY--

AND IT HATH BEEN E'ER IN MY MIND THAT, ON THE DAY WE MET, THE WORLD SHOULD KNOW, FOR ONCE, FOR ALL TIME, WHICH OF US TWO BE THE STRONGER!

NOT REALIZING HIS MUSCULAR FOE IS BLIND-- THOUGH POSSESSED OF OTHER SENSORY POWERS HIGHLY DEVELOPED-- IT IS HERCULES WHO LANDS THE FIRST BLOW.

BUT, IT IS FAR FROM THE LAST WHICH SHALL BE EXCHANGED-- FOR THIS IS THE ETERNAL WHO NOW CALLS HIMSELF "HERO"--

UNNNH!

--AND THE NAME FITS, EVEN IN ADVERSITY!

AND, AS THE BATTLE RAGES...

I STAND WITH THE *ETERNALS* NOW, FATHER--SINCE MY SELF-BANISHMENT FROM ASGARD.

AND I'LL *FIGHT* BESIDE THEM, TOO, AS SOON AS I BECOME *THOR* AGAIN!

THOU NEEDST NOT STRIKE THY *WALKING-STICK* TO REGAIN THINE IMMORTAL STATURE, MY WAYWARD SON--

--I SHALL RESTORE IT *UNTO* THEE!

THOU DOST *TOY* WITH ME, SIRE--AS THOU LONG HAST WITH *MIDGARD* ITSELF.

YET, THOUGH IT DOTH REAVE MINE HEART TO STRIKE OUT AT MINE OWN *FATHER*--

--STILL, I MUST NEEDS SHATTER THY GREAT SPEAR *GUNGNIR*, ERE I CAN JOIN BATTLE AGAINST THE INVADERS FROM *OLYMPUS!*

THWANG!

WHAT? THOU ART, INDEED, THE INSOLENT *WHELP* I DID NAME THEE--TO STRIKE OUT AGAINST THY SIRE--

BUT, BY THE FROSTY BEARD OF YMIR, I SHALL TEACH THEE TO ACCEPT *MY* JUDGMENT AS TO WHETHER THAT ACCURSED MUDBALL EARTH SHALL *LIVE* OR *DIE*.

UNNH

I ACCEPT--NEITHER *THY* JUDGMENT--NOR THAT OF THE *CELESTIALS* TO WHOM THOU ONCE DIDST KNEEL!

HAH! SO AT LAST 'TIS OUT IN THE *OPEN!*

I BUT DID WHAT *HAD* TO BE DONE--AND I'LL NOT ANSWER FOR IT TO THEE, NOR TO ANY OTHER!

THEN, SO LONG AS THOU DOST MAKE OF THYSELF *MIDGARD'S FOE*--

--AN *ALLY*--NAY, MORE, A SERVILE *TOOL*--OF THOSE WHO MAY WELL *DESTROY* THE PLANET EARTH--

--I MUST AND SHALL *OPPOSE* THEE--AYE, EVEN UNTO *DEATH* ITSELF!

MEANWHILE, NOT ALL OF THE ETERNALS OF OLYMPIA HAVE THEIR PRECISE COUNTERPARTS AMONG THE GRAECO-ROMAN INTERLOPERS--

BUT, THOSE WHO DO NOT, STILL MANAGE TO KEEP BUSY:

DEPART FROM THIS PLACE, VILE ONES! YOU HAVE NO BUSINESS HERE.

LORD ZEUS HATH ORDAINED THAT THIS STRONGHOLD BE *DESTROYED*, GOLD-HAIRED ONE...

AND IF *HE* CARES NOT IF A FEW ETERNALS BE STRUCK DOWN IN THE LEVELING, EXPECT NOT MERCY FROM *ARES, GOD OF WAR!*

SMAASH!

NEITHER MERCY-- NOR *INTELLIGENCE*, BATTLER.

BUT, *WE* CANNOT TRULY PERISH, ANY MORE THAN YOU CAN--

NOR WILL YOU FIND US EAGER TO *PLAY* DEAD FOR YOUR KIND.

HOOVES OF CHIRON!

SSSSSS

THOU HAST MELTED MY *WAR-AXE*... *SYMBOL* OF MY POWER!

NOT SYMBOL, ONLY-- BUT *SOURCE*, IT SEEMS.

THOR TOLD ME YOU WERE A *WHINER*-- AND I'D SAY HE DIDN'T KNOW THE *HALF* OF IT!

NO-- STAY B--
AARRRGNH!

KLANK!

YET, IF THE STRENGTH OF IKARIS IS EQUALED BY FEW AMONG OLYMPIANS OF EITHER STRIPE-- AND CERTAINLY NOT BY THE WHIMPERING GOD OF WAR--

--OTHER STRUGGLES AMID THE GLEAMING SPIRES ARE FAR MORE **EQUALLY** MET.

FOR INSTANCE, THE ONE NOW BEING WAGED BETWEEN SWIFT **MAKKARI** OF OLYMPIA-- AND **ANOTHER:**

AMAZING! I ALWAYS THOUGHT MERCURY WAS ONLY A **MYTH**--AND THAT MY DEEDS WERE ATTRIBUTED TO YOU ONLY BECAUSE OF HUMAN **SPEECH IMPEDIMENT.**

MEN ARE **FOOLS**-- TO CONFUSE THE LIKES OF THEE WITH **HERMES,** WHOM THE ROMANS DID CALL **MERCURY.**

WHEN I HAVE FINISHED WITH THY **FACE,** THEY'LL NE'ER CONFUSE US TWO **AGAIN!**

OH, BY THE WAY, IN CASE YOU'RE WONDERING: THIS ENTIRE SCENE TAKES PLACE, WORDS AND ALL, IN LESS THAN **ONE SECOND.**

BOTH MAKKARI AND HERMES ARE DEITIES OF **SPEED,** AFTER ALL.

WHILE, NOT FAR OFF--

LONG HAVE I WISHED TO MEET THEE IN COMBAT, THOU BASEST IMPOSTOR!

THENA IS **NO** IMPOSTOR-- EVEN THOUGH OUR NAMES ARE SO SIMILAR.

IF YOU WERE THE **GODDESS OF WISDOM** YOU'RE REPUTED TO BE, YOU'D **KNOW** THAT--

AND IF YOU'RE ONLY A **BATTLE-GODDESS,** WELL, I FIGURE I CAN HOLD MY OWN ON **THAT** SCORE.

NOT FOR **LONG,** WITCH.

ZAK!

SOON, **ATHENA'S SWORD** SHALL CARVE THEE LIKE A HARPIE!

HOW'RE **YOU** DOING, REJECT, LITTLE BUDDY?

GLAD THE GODS BROUGHT ALONG A FEW **YELLOW-CRESTED TITANS** AS ANTAGONISTS FOR US POOR **MUTATES?**

GODS OR TITANS, KARKAS, IT'S ALL THE SAME TO **ME...**

I WAS CREATED BY THE DEVIANTS TO *SLAY*--AND SLAY *AGAIN.*

AND, THOSE WHOM I CANNOT SLAY--SHALL AT LEAST *REMEMBER* I HAVE PASSED THIS WAY.

WOMP!

THAK!

THEY'LL NOT FORGET *SERSI,* EITHER--

--OR THE DAY THEIR GODLY ARMS TURNED TO *TREE-STUMPS* FOR A TIME!*

BY THE BEARD OF TYPHON!

*OR *SEEMED* TO, RATHER--SINCE SERSI IS A *MISTRESS OF ILLUSIONS.* --ROY.

SLENDER AND DELICATE ARE THE CHAINS WHICH CONNECT EVENTS, ONE TO THE OTHER.

FOR, AT THIS VERY MOMENT, IN THE NEW YORK APARTMENT BELONGING TO SERSI'S HUMAN PERSONA...

*...MARGO DAMIAN LOOKS OUT UPON HER WORLD, AND PONDERS THE FATE OF HER ARCHEOLOGIST **FATHER**...*

*...WHO DWELLS THESE PAST LONG MONTHS BENEATH THE MAMMOTH **DOME CITY** ERECTED IN THE TOWERING ANDES BY THE AWESOME, MYSTERIOUS **CELESTIALS.***

*HE MISSES HIS BELOVED **DAUGHTER,** OF COURSE...*

BUT HIS MIND IS MOSTLY ON THE HUGE SPACE GODS, AND ON...

THE *ETERNALS!*

EVEN *AJAK* PIERCED THE DOME, TO JOIN THEM IN THEIR FAR-OFF CITY. I WONDER *WHY!?*

AND THUS, AS WE COME FULL CIRCLE...

DESTROY, GODS OF OLYMPUS!

LET NOT *STONE* REMAIN UPON *STONE* OF THIS HATED PLACE!

LOOK YOU! *FATHER ZURAS* HAS REGAINED HIS STRENGTH!

ZEUS! FOR LONG EONS, WE HAVE EXISTED APART IN MUTUAL RESPECT, THOUGH KNOWING LITTLE OF EACH OTHER.

I COMMAND YOU: TELL ME WHY YOU HAVE *BREACHED* OUR TRUCE.

DOES THE EAGLE ANSWER THE SPARROW? I OWE THEE NEITHER ANSWER *NOR* RESPECT.

YOU'LL NOT SPEAK TO *FATHER ZURAS* THAT WAY! WE'LL--

VALKIN--*NO!*

THOU DIDST WELL TO TRY TO *SPARE* THY FELLOW ETERNALS *PAIN*, ZURAS.

BUT, ALAS, EACH GENERATION-- WHETHER OF GODS OR MEN, OR RACES IN BETWEEN-- MUST SUFFER FOR *ITSELF*.

BY THE POLAR WINDS! THE LIGHTNING-BOLTS OF ZEUS SCATTER US-- AS IF WE WERE MERE STRAWS IN THE STORM-WINDS!

THAT'S ALL YOU *ARE*-- BEFORE SUCH AS HE.

I, HOWEVER, AM *ELDEST* OF THE ETERNALS-- AND *MIGHTIEST*, AS WELL.

NOT EVEN THE *LORD OF OLYMPUS* SHALL DISPOSE OF THE *MASTER OF OLYMPIA* SO EASILY.

DEPART FROM MY DOMAIN, INVADER-- OR WE TWO IMMORTALS SHALL FIGHT THE UNTHINKABLE: *A BATTLE TO THE DEATH!*

UNTHINKABLE TO *THEE*, PERHAPS, ZURAS-- NOT TO *ZEUS*.

THOU MAYEST NOT *PERISH*, AYE, IN THE WAY MERE *MORTALS* DO--

YET, THINE *ATOMS* MAY BE CAST TO THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE EARTH--

--AND 'TIS *ZEUS* THAT HATH POWER ENOW TO DO IT, UNLESS THOU DOST *SURRENDER* FORTHWITH!

HERE IS YOUR ANSWER, MAD GOD: *DEFIANCE*, IN DEFENSE OF HERITAGE AND HOMELAND.

LET US *CLASH* INDEED-- TILL THERE BE BUT *ONE* REMAINING, OF TWO WHO HAVE BIRTHED A *NATION OF LEGENDS* ON THE WORLD OF MEN!

YET, THOUGH TWO NAMESAKES SMITE EACH OTHER, THE MOST **DRAMATIC** OF THE CONFRONTATIONS THIS DAY IS STILL THAT BETWEEN **FATHER** AND **SON**...

FOOLISH *CUB!* DOST THOU THINK TO DEMOLISH *GUNGNIR*, E'EN WITH *MJOLNIR* ITSELF?

KLANG

DIDST THOU NOT *LEARN* THY LESSON, A MILLENNIUM AGONE?

I KNOW NOT WHAT THOU DOST *MEAN*, SIRE-THAT-WAS.

ZAPT!

NE'ER BEFORE HAVE I RAISED MINE HAND 'GAINST THY SPEAR IN ANGER-- NOR DO I SO NOW SAVE WITH A *HEART THAT CRACKS*--

YET, THERE BE *QUESTIONS* THAT CRY FOR **ANSWERS**:

QUESTIONS OF *MY LINEAGE*-- MY MYSTIC CONNECTION WITH *MIDGARD*--

--AND, MOST STRONGLY, MOST URGENTLY-- QUESTIONS OF *WHY* THOU DIDST BEND THE KNEE TO THE *CELESTIALS*--

--AND WHY WHATE'ER *UNHOLY VOW* THOU THEN DIDST MAKE-- NOW LEADS THEE TO ATTACK *OLYMPIA*-- IN ALLIANCE WITH THE HORDES OF *ZEUS*.

"IN ALLIANCE WITH THEM"?

'TIS *THEY* WHO DID COME HERE AT *MY* BEHEST!

THEN, THIS ACT OF BASE PERFIDY WAS CHILD OF *THY* BRAIN?

IF SO, THEN *NE'ER AGAIN* SHALL I CALL THEE *FATHER!*

'TIS A *SIN BEYOND FORGIVING*-- TO HAVE ATTACKED THE ETERNALS' CITY WHILE THEIR FACES WERE TURNED SKYWARD.

SIN!? WHAT KNOWEST *THOU* OF SIN-- OR OF THE DREAD *CONSEQUENCES* THEREOF?

BUT, ALREADY I HAVE SAID *TOO MUCH*-- UTTERED MORE THAN I WOULD E'ER HAVE DREAMED.

I MUST **ACT** NOW TO ASSURE THE THE FULFILLMENT OF A FATE LONG DECREED--

--THROUGH THE ETERNALS' DEFEAT--

--AND THROUGH THINE OWN!

ARRRH

NEXT MOMENT, THE STRICKEN THOR LIES VERY STILL INDEED AMONG THE FAST-CRUMBLING MINARETS OF OLYMPIA.

MAY THE NORN-FATES FORGIVE ME! HATH IT COME, THEN, TO THIS?

MUST I SLAY MINE OWN, MINE ONLY SON--TO DECIDE THE DESTINY OF ACCURSED MIDGARD?

'TWOULD BE SLAYING A PART OF MYSELF, TO DRIVE HOME THIS MAGIC SPEAR-- AND END A LIFE OTHERWISE BEYOND ENDING.

AND YET--

--AND YET, I MUST!

ODIN HATH SWORN AN OATH-- TAKEN A VOW MORE HOLY E'EN THAN THE BOND 'TWIXT FATHER AND SON!

AND, FOR THE SAKE OF THAT OATH-- THOR MUST DIE!

NEXT ISSUE • IF AN EYE OFFEND THEE!

Beginning: THE AWESOMELY AWFUL SECRET OF ODIN!

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THE MIGHTY THOR™

THOR MUST DIE--

--AT THE HAND OF HIS OWN FATHER!

KEITH & BOB

When DR. DONALD BLAKE strikes his wooden walking-stick upon the ground, it becomes the mystic hammer MJOLNIR— and the lame physician is transformed into the Norse God of Thunder, Master of the Storm, Lord of the Living Lightning— and heir to the throne of eternal Asgard....

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IF AN EYE OFFEND THEE....!

AS THE LATE GREAT ROD SERLING MIGHT HAVE PUT IT: "PORTRAIT OF A GOD IN TORMENT..."

MAY THE NORN-FATES FORGIVE ME! HATH IT COME, THEN, TO *THIS*?

MUST I SLAY MINE OWN, MINE *ONLY* SON -- TO DECIDE THE DESTINY OF ACCURSED *MIDGARD**?

'TWOULD BE SLAYING A PART OF *MYSELF*, TO DRIVE HOME THIS MAGIC SPEAR--AND END A LIFE OTHERWISE *BEYOND* ENDING.

AND YET-- I *MUST!*

*MIDGARD = EARTH.--R.T.

LF629

FOR LONG MOMENTS, AS HE HOLDS HIS MYSTIC WEAPON **GUNGNIR** POISED ABOVE THOR'S UNCONSCIOUS FORM, ALL-FATHER ODIN **LIVES AGAIN** THE EPOCHAL EVENTS WHICH HAVE BEFALLEN HIM SINCE HE LEFT THE GLEAMING SPIRES OF **ASGARD**, SO RECENTLY, YET A SEEMING ETERNITY AGO:

HIS JOURNEY ON EIGHT-HOOVED SLEIPNIR, TO **OLYMPUS**, OTHERWORLDLY HOMELAND OF THE **GRAECO-ROMAN GODS**-- RULED OVER BY **ZEUS**, LOFTIEST OF SKY-SPIRITS.

HE SEES ANEW THE THREAT OF ACTION BY THE **ETERNALS** AGAINST THE EARTH-ORBITING MOTHER SHIP OF THE **CELESTIALS**--

--AS ALL ETERNALS FORM THE AWESOME ENTITY THEY CALL THE **UNI-MIND**, AND HEAD INTO THE BLACKNESS OF SPACE.

YET, WHEN ODIN AND ZEUS WOULD HAVE LED THE IMMORTALS OF OLYMPUS IN **DESTROYING** THE CITY OF THE ETERNALS, IT WAS HIS OWN SON **THOR** WHO STOOD ATHWART THE SKY-WARD PATH--

--THOUGH EVEN THE EXILED **HEIR OF ASGARD** COULD NOT PREVENT SUCH A MIGHTY THRONG FROM BEGINNING THEIR WORK--THE **SMASHING OF OLYMPIA!**

THE UNI-MIND THUS WEAKENED, THE ETERNALS WERE FORCED TO RETURN TO EARTH, BEFORE THEY HAD CLOSED IN BATTLE WITH THE **PRIME CELESTIAL**...

AND SO, LED BY MIGHTY **FATHER ZURAS**, THE MASTERS OF **OLYMPIA** FOUGHT BRAVELY AND WELL AGAINST THE IN-VADERS FROM **OLYMPUS**...

...THOUGH, EXCEPT FOR THE THREE GRIM, BEARDED **LEADERS**, NO ONE ON EITHER SIDE SEEMED TO KNOW TRULY **WHY** THEY FOUGHT.

AND THEN, IN THE FEARSOME **CLIMAX** OF THIS CLASH OF MYRIAD TITANS, THOR COULD NOT BRING HIMSELF TO USE HIS **FULL FORCE** AGAINST HIS VENGEFUL SIRE--

--AND THUS WAS **FELLED** BY THE HARD-SWUNG HAFT OF THE **SPEAR OF HEAVEN!**

NOW, ODIN SPEAKS AGAIN, IN A VOICE AS FULL OF FRUSTRATION AS OF FURY...

ODIN HATH SWORN AN OATH-- TAKEN A VOW MORE HOLY E'EN THAN THE BOND 'TWIXT FATHER AND SON!

AND, FOR THE SAKE OF THAT OATH-- THOR MUST DIE!

STRIKE THEN-- SIRE--

THOR-- SHALL NOT STAY-- THINE HAND--!

SUDDENLY, A STRANGE LOOK PASSES ACROSS THE ALL-FATHER'S CRAGGY FACE-- LIKE A SHADOW, LIFTED AFTER A LONG ETERNITY...

WHAT? WHAT'S THIS? WHAT IS'T I DO?

SLAY MINE OWN SON-- WITH THREE-POINTED GUNGNIR?!

NAY! LET THE SKIES ABOVE ME TREMBLE-- THE MOUNTAINS SHAKE WITH RAGE--

--I'LL NOT SLAY MINE ONLY BLOODSON AGAIN!

NOT AGAIN!!

LIKE A RIVENING THUNDERBOLT, THE ENCHANTED SPEAR HURTLES WITH A MIGHTY ROAR ABOVE THE CRUMBLING RUINS OF OLYMPIA--

--AND BE THEY GODS OR ETERNALS, TITANS OR MUTATES-- THE AWESOME ANTAGONISTS CEASE THEIR STRUGGLES-- LOOK UP-- AND WONDER!

SIRE-- THOU HAST THROWN AWAY *GUNGNIR*, WHICH BE SYMBOL OF THY POWER AS TRULY AS *MJOLNIR* BE OF MINE!

WILT THOU TELL ME NOW-- *WHY* THOU HAST LED THE GODS OF OLYMPUS HITHER?

NAY. THAT HATH NOT CHANGED, MY SON.

I CAN TELL THEE *NAUGHT.*

YET, THOU DIDST SPEAK OF REFUSING TO SLAY ME *"AGAIN"!*

PRESS ME *NOT*, GODLING!

WHAT DID THY WORDS MEAN, SIRE-- *FATHER?*

HEAR ONLY *THIS:*

"IF AN EYE OFFEND THEE, *PLUCK IT OUT!*

"IT SHALL NE'ERMORE BE *PART* OF THEE-- YET IT SHALL *E'ER* BE PART OF THEE.

"FOR, IT HATH KNOWN WHAT *THOU* KNOWEST-- SEEN WHAT *THOU* HAST TURNED TO SEE!"

LET READ THIS RIDDLE, *HE WHO MAY!*

FOR MINE OWN SELF, I GO NOW TO RETRIEVE MY WORLD-CONQUERING *SPEAR*.

?*UNNNH!*? THIS BE TRULY-- *BEYOND* ALL BELIEVING!

EVEN THE *STRENGTH OF HERCULES* CANNOT DRAW THE ASGARDIAN'S WEAPON FROM THIS *STONE* WHERE IT STRUCK.

HAH! MAYBE YOU SHOULD ASK ONE OF US *ETERNALS* TO HELP YOU, DEMI-GOD.

FOR ONCE WE *AGREE*, IKARIS.

FLEAS OF OLYMPIA! IF HERCULES CANNOT BUDGE THE SPEAR, THEN *NO* MAN OR IMMORTAL CAN--

CHIRON'S HOOVES!

THE SPEAR FLEW AWAY-- UNDER ITS *OWN POWER!*

IF THOU HAST *QUITE DONE*, LORD ODIN, WITH IMPRESSING US ALL WITH THY *POWER*:

LET US BEGIN THE *BATTLE* ANEW-- THAT BATTLE WHICH WE OF OLYMPUS DID INITIATE MORE AT *THY* BEHEST THAN FOR OUR OWN SAKE!

WE OF *OLYMPIA* WANT NO BATTLE, ZEUS-- AT LEAST NOT WITH YOU, BUT ONLY WITH THE *CELESTIALS*, WHO MEAN TO JUDGE WHETHER THE EARTH SHALL LIVE OR DIE.

STILL, IF BATTLE IT *MUST* BE-- THEN BATTLE IT *SHALL* BE!

NAY, ETERNAL-- NOT OF ITS OWN POWER, BUT OF *MINE!*

FOR, VERILY, THIS SPEAR BE BUT THE EXTENSION OF THE *ALL-FATHER OF ASGARD*.

WELL SPOKEN, ZURAS. THOU ART A FAR *WORTHIER* FOEMAN THAN E'ER I DID THINK THOU WOULDST MAKE.

WELL, LORD ODIN? WILT THOU TAKE UP THY SPEAR AGAIN-- E'EN IF IT MUST CLOSE WITH THINE OFFSPRING'S *HAMMER*?

NAY, LORD ZEUS.

FORGIVE ME, I PRAY THEE-- BUT I *CANNOT* CLOSE IN BATTLE WITH THESE ETERNALS, IF IT MEANS DOING VIOLENCE TO MINE OWN *SON*.

I SEE THAT NOW.

AND *I* SEE THAT YOU'VE LOOSED ZEUS' WAR-DOGS ON US-- RAZED HALF OF OLYMPIA-- AND NOW SEEK TO *QUIT* THE QUARREL.

ODIN DOTH SEEK *NAUGHT*, ZURAS...

ODIN DOTH-- WHAT *ODIN WILLS!*

FARE THEE WELL, LORD OF OLYMPUS!

WAIT-- FATHER!

FARE *THEE* WELL, LORD ODIN.

I PRAY THOU *KNOWEST* WHAT THOU HAST DONE!

WHAT HAS HE DONE, DOG OF OLYMPUS?

NO, *SPARE* ME THAT ANSWER, AND GIVE ME ONLY *THIS:*

WILL YOU GET YOUR IGNOBLE MINIONS *OUT* OF OLYMPIA, AND BACK WHERE THEY BELONG-- OR MUST WE *CLASH* ANEW?

PUSH ME NOT *O'ERFAR*, BASE IMITATOR--

-- OR I SHALL FIGHT THY KIND FOR MINE *OWN* REASONS, WITH NO NEED OF *ODIN!*

MERELY SAY THE *WORD*, FATHER ZURAS, AND WE'LL PROVE TO THIS INTERLOPER THAT WE IMITATE *NO ONE*-- LEAST OF ALL ONE WHO HAS *IGNORED* THE EARTH FOR SO MANY CENTURIES!

AND IN THAT FIGHT, SIRE, THOU CANST COUNT ON *ODIN'S SON* TO FIGHT AT THY SIDE!

NAY, THOR--

--I BEG THEE, BE NOT SO *FOOLHARDY* AS TO STAND WITH THESE *LESSER* BEINGS!

'TWOULD BE *HERCULES* THOU MIGHT FACE NEXT-- AND THAT WOULD *SADDEN* ME.

AND *ME* AS WELL, PRINCE OF POWER.

YET, THOR DOTH BACK DOWN NOT E'EN FOR THE *SON OF ZEUS.*

BAIT ME *NOT*, GOLDMANE-- OR, FRIENDS THOUGH WE BE--!

THOR CAN HAVE *NO* FRIENDS WHO WOULD STRIKE AGAINST HIS NEWFOUND BROTHERS OF *OLYMPIA*.

HOLD YE BOTH! THERE BE NO CAUSE FOR FURTHER COMBAT.

ARE YOU *CERTAIN* OF THAT, ZEUS?

AYE-- FOR, 'TIS THE *FATE OF EARTH* WHICH IS AT THE HEART OF THE MATTER, IS IT NOT-- A THING WHICH MATTERS *NOT* TO US OF OLYMPUS.

THEN WHY DID YOU RESPOND TO ODIN'S CALL FOR AN *ALLIANCE* AGAINST US?

MORE FOR REASONS OF *OLD RESENTMENT* THAN FOR ANY GOOD REASON, I NOW DO REALIZE...

BUT NOW, 'TIS TIME WE *DEPARTED* FROM THIS PLACE-- HOPEFULLY, NE'ER AGAIN TO CLASH WITH THE SPIRITUAL SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF ZURAS.

NOR I WITH *THEE*, ODINSON.

'TIS MY WISH ALSO, HERCULES.

WHAT? MUST WE FLEE OLYMPIA, OUR TAILS BETWEEN OUR LEGS?

PAY NO MIND TO THE GODLING WHOSE ONLY REASON FOR BEING IS *WAR*, OLYMPIANS -- AND THOR.

KNOW YE, ZURAS, THAT THIS WAS THE *DAY OF ZEUS' FOLLY!*

LONG HATH THE MERE KNOWLEDGE OF THE VERY *EXISTENCE OF OLYMPIA* BEEN A THORN IN MY MIND'S FLESH-- FOR THAT EXISTENCE SEEMED TO MOCK THE FORMER GLORIES OF *OLYMPUS*, IN DAYS OF YORE.

BUT NOW, I SEE THAT, THOUGH LORD ODIN DID PLAY UPON SUCH FEELINGS, WE HAVE *NO QUARREL* WITH THEE AND THY KIND.

EONS AGO, WE OF OLYMPUS MADE THE DECISION TO *QUIT* THIS MUDBALL PLANET, WHEN THOSE WHO DID BELIEVE IN US *CEASED* TO DO SO.

WE LEFT IT THEN TO ITS *OWN* DEVICES...

...AND AS OF THIS MOMENT, WE DO SO *AGAIN*...

...FOR *ALL TIME!*

THE GODS OF OLYMPUS ARE GONE... THEIR MENACE ENDED.

TIME, THEN, TO BIND OUR WOUNDS...AND *REBUILD* OUR RUINED CITY.

TELL ME, ZURAS...

HAST THOU, THEN, RENOUNCED THY PLAN TO *CHALLENGE* THE CELESTIALS WHO SPAWNED THY RACE?

WILT THOU JOIN WITH *ME*, THEN, TO SAVE MIDGARD FROM THEIR *FIFTY-YEAR JUDGMENT*?

NO, ASGARDIAN.

WE ETERNALS SHALL GO OUR *OWN* WAY, IN OUR ATTEMPT TO SAVE THIS PLANET WE ALL SHARE.

YET, IT MAY BE THAT, WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE-- *WE TOO* SHALL BE FORCED TO BEND THE KNEE BEFORE THE CELESTIALS.

NOW, I MUST REJOIN MY PEOPLE...!

WHY SUDDENLY SO *GRIM*, THOR?

WHEN ZURAS DID SPEAK OF "BENDING THE KNEE"-- IT DID *REMIND* ME OF SOMETHING.

HE DIDN'T *MEAN* THOSE WORDS... NOT REALLY.

HE'S MERELY *SHAKEN* BY RECENT EVENTS.

NOW, IF YOU'LL PARDON ME-- I MUST HELP MY *FELLOW ETERNALS*.

AYE, VERILY.

AND FORTUNATE THOU ART, E'EN IN ADVERSITY, IKARIS...THAT THOU *HAST* FELLOWS--AND BE NOT *CAST OUT* FROM THINE OWN KIND, AS *I* BE!

STILL, MY FATHER DID REFUSE TO SMITE ME WITH *GUNGNIR*.

BUT *WHY*-- WHEN 'TIS PAINFULLY OBVIOUS THAT HE LED THE GODS OF OLYMPUS HERE TO FULFILL WHATEVER *UNHOLY VOW* HE MADE A THOUSAND YEARS AGONE, TO THE *CELESTIALS*.*

*ISSUE #288. --ROY.

HE SPOKE AS IF HE *WOULD* HAVE REVEALED MORE TO ME-- BUT *COULD NOT*--

--AS IF HE'D STRUCK ME DOWN BEFORE-- BUT I REMEMBER NOT.

THEN-- THERE BE THE *RIDDLE* HE SPOKE-- IT'S TALK OF *EYES*--!

OF COURSE! *ODIN* DID PLUCK OUT AN EYE-- TO GAIN SOME UNKNOWN BIT OF KNOWLEDGE FROM *MIMIR*, THAT FLAMING HEAD OF HATRED! *

'TIS NO LONGER PART OF HIM-- YET MAYHAP 'TWILL *ALWAYS* BE, AS THE RIDDLE DID SAY.

*ISSUE #274. --ROY.

WHAT *ELSE* WAS IT THE ALL-FATHER SAID?--

YES! "IT HATH KNOWN WHAT *THOU* KNOWEST-- SEEN WHAT *THOU* HAST TURNED TO SEE!"

THEN-- *HEAR* ME, MJOLNIR, THOU MYSTIC MALLET!

THOU WERT MY FATHER'S *GIFT SUPREME* TO ME.

OPEN WIDE THE *GATES OF TIMELESS SPACE*-- AND SHOW ME *WHITHER* ODIN'S EYE DID GO, WHEN HE DID CAST IT INTO THAT FIERY WELL!

HEIMDALL'S HORN! VERILY, VISTAS BEYOND WHAT E'EN *I* DO RECOGNIZE DO SUDDENLY APPEAR BEFORE ME!

I DO BEHOLD A WORLD OF WONDERS-- A TIMELESS PLACE, A PLACELESS TIME WHICH DOTH *DEFY* ALL LAW AND LOGIC!

WHAT *IS* IT I SEE? SOME BARREN LANDSCAPE, *DEVOID OF LIFE?*

BUT NAY-- THERE BE *DWELLINGS*, AS IF TORN FROM SOME *CHILDREN'S FAIRYTALE* ON MIDGARD!

YET, HAVE I FOUND THE PLACE I *SEEK*-- OR DOTH MINE HAMMER PLAY *GAMES* WITH ME?

"*HOLD!* NOW, *LIVING BEINGS* DO ISSUE FORTH FROM THE THATCHED HUTS-- *DWARVES*, YET NOT THAT KIND WHICH I HAVE SEEN BEFORE!

"AND-- I HEAR THEM *CRY OUT* IN STARK TERROR--

FLEE! FLEE! IT COMES AGAIN!

"EH? IS IT *THOR* THEY ESPY, SOME-HOW, OR--?

"NAY! 'TIS YON GARGANTUAN *EYE*, WHICH DOTH HOVER 'PON THAT WORLD'S HORIZON LIKE AN *EVIL SUNSET!*

"'TIS SO *HUGE*-- AND IT DOTH RADIATE, E'EN ACROSS SO VAST A DISTANCE, SUCH AN AURA OF *MALIGNANCY* AND *POWER* THAT--"

BLOOD OF YMIR! NOW IT DOTH HURL *WITHERING FIRE* UPON THE LAND-- SO THAT THE DWARFLINGS RUN IN FEAR!

YONDER EYE MAY OR MAY *NOT* BE THE THING I SEEK--

YET I CAN-NOT LET THEM *PERISH!*

AND, IF *'TIS* MY FATHER'S EYE, SOMEHOW GROWN GIGANTIC AND TERRIBLE--

--THEN MOST *SURELY* I MUST NOT LET IT WREAK SUCH HAVOC *WHERE'ER* IT BE.

MJOLNIR! THOU WAST STRIPPED LATELY OF THY POWERS TO *BEND TIME* IN ITS FLIGHT--

--BUT NOT OF THINE ABILITY TO TRANSPORT ME TO WORLDS *WITHIN* WORLDS-- AND WORLDS *BESIDE* WORLDS!

IF IT BE SUCH I HAVE SEEN-- THEN *TAKE* ME THERE, I COMMAND THEE!

*NEXT INSTANT, THE THUNDER GOD STANDS **NO MORE** AMID THE RUINS OF THE ETERNALS' CITY--*

*--BUT FEELS HIS ENCHANTED URU HAMMER **PULLING** HIM LIKE A TORRENT-CAUGHT LEAF, THROUGH THE SPACE **BETWEEN** THE WORLDS WE KNOW.*

TRULY, THIS BE *MADNESS WITHOUT PARALLEL!*

I KNOW NOT E'EN *WHY* I DID THINK THAT MJOLNIR COULD FIND THE *EYE OF ODIN* FOR ME-- LET ALONE IF IT *HATH* DONE SO.

YET, I DO FEEL SO *STRONGLY* THAT THE ANSWERS I SEEK SHALL BE FOUND IN YON *NETHER SPHERE* TOWARD WHICH I'M DRAWN--

--THAT, WERE THAT WORLD HEL ITSELF--

--I'D PLUMMET IN, AND LOKI TAKE THE HINDMOST!

HAIL, LITTLE ONES!

L-LOOK!

H-HAVE YOU COME TO SAVE US FROM THE EYE, GREAT STRANGER?

OR HAVE YOU COME MERELY TO ADD TO OUR MISERY?

THAT WOULD BE HARD TO DO, METHINKS.

TELL ME, QUICKLY, WHAT THOU MAYEST KNOW ABOUT THY TORMENTING ORB!

KNOW? WHAT CAN WE KNOW-- SAVE THAT IT APPEARED NOT LONG AGO, AND HAS MADE OUR LIVES A LIVING TORTURE, SINCE--

AIEEE! IT COMES AFTER US-- NOT CONTENT THIS TIME MERELY TO LAY WASTE OUR VILLAGE!

TAKE COVER, THEN, DWARF-LINGS.

THOR WILL PROTECT THEE FROM YON EVIL EYE.

EVIL EYE?? WHAT KNOWEST THOU OF EVIL, INTRUDER, ANY MORE THAN OF THE FORCES THOU DOST RECKLESSLY FACE?

I KNOW THAT I BE THOR-- GOD OF THUNDER, AND SON OF ODIN!

AND ART THOU MY FATHER'S EYE, THAT HE DID CAST OUT OF ASGARD?

EYE KNOW THE ANSWER TO THAT... BUT EYE WILL NOT SAY.

ANSWER ME WILLING-LY-- AND SWEAR, MORE-OVER, TO LET YONDER POOR CREATURES DWELL IN PEACE--

--OR THOR AND MJOLNIR WILL--

WILL WHAT, OFFAL OF ASGARD?

SZZ

RAK!

FRAPP!

WHAT HAVE EYE TO FEAR FROM THE LIKES OF YOU??

=UNNHHGN!= THY FIRE-BOLTS ARE AWESOME, INDEED--

STILL, A FIRE MAY BE SMOTHERED-- BY RAIN!

THUMP! THUMP!

NOW, THOU MOST ARROGANT ORB-- ANSWER ME! ART THOU THE EYE OF THE ALL-FATHER?

AND IF SO, THEN UPON WHAT HAST THOU FED THAT THOU ART GROWN SO VAST?

YOU HAVE COME INTO EYE'S DOMAIN WITH MANY QUESTIONS, INTERLOPER--

WHAT? THAT LIGHT-- BLINDING ME--

E'EN MINE EYELIDS CANNOT KEEP IT OUT!

PERHAPS THESE MAY ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS BETTER THAN EYE!

MONSTERS-- SUCH AS NE'ER WERE SEEN ON EARTH OR IN ASGARD, BUT ONLY IN SOME DEMON'S NIGHTMARE!

THEY SPRING UP FROM THE VERY SOIL-- AS IF BIRTHED BY THE VERY RAIN I DID BRING!

BUT NAY-- SUCH A THING BE NOT WITHIN THE *REALM OF THE POSSIBLE.*

FWUMP!

THERE BE BUT ONE *OTHER* ANSWER, THEN--

--AND MJOLNIR HATH PROVED IT THE *TRUE* ONE!

THEY BE *IMAGES* ALL--

-- CAST LIKE VENGEFUL *SPEARS* BY YON EVIL EYE!

PREPARE, THEN, TO BE *CONQUERED*, ORB! THEY'LL KEEP ME FROM THEE NO LONGER.

PERHAPS THEY WILL NOT...

...BUT EYE THINK THIS ONE SHALL!

GNARR

GOLDEN APPLES OF IDUNN!

THE FINAL MONSTER I DID SUPPOSE A MIRAGE-- WAS INSTEAD A LEATHERY THING OF *FLESH AND BLOOD!*

IT HATH GRIPPED MINE *HAMMER*- MY VERY *LIMBS*--

--AND 'TIS BEARING ME BACK TOWARD ITS OBSCENE *LAIR!*

I SAY THEE-- *NAY!*

EYE FIND YOU A FAR STRONGER OPPONENT THAN *EYE* DID IMAGINE, THOR OF ASGARD.

THUNK!

THOU *KNOWEST* WHO I AM!?

THEN, SINCE I'VE NE'ER TROD THIS WORLD ERE NOW, THAT DOTH PROVE THOU ART INDEED THE *EYE OF ODIN!*

THAT IS WHAT *EYE* WAS-- BUT *EYE* AM NO MORE!

EYE WANT YOU TO GET OFF THIS WORLD!

THOU SHOULDST PLAY THE *SUPPLICANT,* VILLAINOUS ORGAN-- NO LONGER THE *TYRANT!*

NOW, BY ALL THE GODS OF ALL THE PANTHEONS THAT EVER WERE--

-- I *WILL* KNOW WHAT I *MUST* KNOW!

KEEP AWAY! EYE KNOW NOTHING THAT CAN HELP YOU!

THOU DOST *LIE* MOST BASELY--

--AS MINE HAMMER AND HAND NOW SHALL *PROVE!*

WH-WHAT ARE YOU DOING--??

DOST NOT THOU KNOW? CANST THOU NOT *FEEL?*

I AM *THOR*--GOD OF *THUNDER*--LORD OF THE LIVING *LIGHTNING*--

--AND *MASTER OF THE SHRIEKING* **STORM WINDS!**

WITHIN BARE INSTANTS, THE WHIRLING MJOLNIR HAS CREATED A MIGHTY ***VORTEX***--*AN IRRESISTIBLE* ***TORNADO*** *OF MOTION IN THIS WORLD BETWEEN THE WORLDS WE KNOW--*

--AND THE DWARFLINGS LEARN, TO THEIR SORROW, THAT MANY A SPHERE MAY BE HALF ***DESTROYED*** *IN THE SAVING.*

MINE HEART BE SORELY *HEAVY* FOR THAT WHICH I HAVE DONE.

I SHALL RESTORE THE DWELLINGS OF THE LITTLE ONES--WHEN THOU HAST SURRENDERED UNTO ME THY *SECRET.*

AND IF EYE RESIST YOU--FOR A WEEK, A MONTH, A YEAR--?

THE TIME THAT WOULD BE ON THY TONGUE, IF THOU HADST A TONGUE, BE *FIFTY YEARS*, EYE:

THE VERY SPAN WHICH MIDGARD HATH, PERHAPS, TO *LIVE!*

WHAT DO YOU WISH THAT *EYE* TELL YOU--

FAIR ENOW-- THOUGH THE CHOICE BE A LIVING *TORMENT* FOR ME.

A *VISION* SHOWED ME MY FATHER ODIN BOWING DOWN BEFORE THE *CELESTIALS*, A THOUSAND YEARS AGONE-- BUT *NAY!*

ANOTHER MATTER DOTH LIE AT THE VERY *HEART* OF THE HURRICANE WHICH DOTH RAGE WITHIN ME MORE FIERCELY THAN THIS THAT ROARS WITHOUT:

--BUT, KNOW YOU THAT *EYE* SHALL ANSWER *ONE* QUESTION, AND ONE *ONLY!*

IN THE CITY OF THE ETERNALS, THE ALL-FATHER NEARLY *SLEW* ME WITH HIS SACRED SPEAR-- YET HE *HELD BACK*, CRYING OUT THAT HE HAD SLAIN ME ONCE BEFORE, AND WOULD NOT DO SO *AGAIN!*

TELL ME-- *SHOW* ME, IF THOU CANST-- WHEREOF MY FATHER DID SPEAK, FOR I REMEMBER IT *NOT!*

YOU ARE RASH, THUNDERER-- BUT YOU ARE *WISE*, TOO--

--FOR YOU HAVE ASKED, PERHAPS, THE *ONE* QUESTION WHICH MAY, IN THE END, TELL YOU *ALL.*

LISTEN, THEN-- LISTEN LONG, LISTEN *WELL*--

--AND WHEN *EYE* AM FINISHED, YOU *WILL NEVER AGAIN BE THE SAME--!*

NEXT ISSUE: **CYCLES AND SPACE GODS!**

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THE MIGHTY

THOR™

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WHAT LIES BEHIND--

THE DOOR TO THE MIND'S DARK EYE?

pollard & LAYTON

When DR. DONALD BLAKE strikes his wooden walking-stick upon the ground, it becomes the mystic hammer MJOLNIR— and the lame physician is transformed into the Norse God of Thunder, Master of the Storm, Lord of the Living Lightning— and heir to the throne of eternal Asgard....

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR!®

ROY THOMAS WRITER / EDITOR ✶ KEITH POLLARD & CHIC STONE ILLUSTRATORS ✶ JOE ROSEN, LETTERER C. GAFFORD, COLORIST ✶ JIM SHOOTER CONSULTING EDITOR

THE TWILIGHT OF SOME GODS!

THOR HAS JOURNEYED TO A DIMENSIONAL NETHERWORLD -- THERE TO FORCE THE LOST EYE OF ODIN TO YIELD UP ITS BANEFUL SECRETS. BUT, LITTLE DOES OUR TEMPEST-TOSSING THUNDER GOD SUSPECT THAT ONE OF THOSE SECRETS WILL BE --

WHAT DO YOU WISH THAT EYE TELL YOU?

BUT, KNOW YOU THAT EYE SHALL ANSWER ONE QUESTION, AND ONE ONLY!

FAIR ENOW -- THOUGH THE CHOICE OF QUESTIONS BE A LIVING TORMENT UNTO ME!

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO MARK GRUENWALD & RALPH MACCHIO FOR SOME MULTIVERSAL BON MOTS

LF659

A *VISION* DID SHOW ME MY FATHER *ODIN* BOWING DOWN BEFORE THE SPACE-SPAWNED *CELESTIALS*, A THOUSAND YEARS AGONE, AND I WOULD KNOW--*

BUT *NAY!* 'TIS NOT *THAT* WHICH I MUST ASK THEE, AS MY ONE QUESTION...

*DIALOGUE PARAPHRASED FROM PREVIOUS ISSUE,--*ROY.*

'TIS *ANOTHER* MATTER WHICH DOTH LIE AT THE VERY *HEART* OF THE HURRICANE WHICH DOTH RAGE *WITHIN* ME, MORE FIERCELY THAN THIS WHICH ROARS *WITHOUT:*

IN THE *CITY OF THE ETERNALS*, WHICH LORD ODIN DID PERSUADE *ZEUS* AND THE LESSER *GODS OF OLYMPUS* TO INVADE SO SHORT A TIME AGO--*

*ISSUE *291. --R.T.

--THE ALL-FATHER NIGH *SLEW* ME WITH HIS SACRED SPEAR *GUNGNIR*, WHEN I DID REFRAIN FROM USING MY FULL POWER AGAINST HIM.

YET, AT THE LAST MOMENT, HE *HELD BACK*-- CRYING OUT THAT HE HAD SLAIN ME *ONCE BEFORE*, AND WOULD NOT DO SO *AGAIN!*

TELL ME--NAY, *SHOW* ME, IF THOU CANST-- WHEREOF MY FATHER DID SPEAK, FOR I *REMEMBER IT NOT!*

*YOU ARE RASH, THUNDERER--BUT YOU ARE **WISE**, TOO--*

*FOR, YOU HAVE ASKED, PERHAPS, THE **ONE** QUESTION WHICH MAY, IN THE END, TELL YOU **ALL**.*

***LISTEN**, THEN-- LISTEN LONG, LISTEN **WELL**--*

*--AND WHEN **EYE** AM FINISHED, **YOU MAY NEVER AGAIN BE THE SAME!***

THUS, THINK CAREFULLY BEFORE **EYE** AM FORCED TO REVEAL THAT WHICH **EYE**, AND **EYE** ALONE, MAY TELL YOU.

YOU MAY NOT LIKE WHAT **EYE** HAVE TO SAY...!

CONFOUND YOUR ETERNAL DELAYING, ORB OF EVIL--

TELL ME WHAT THOU KNOWEST, AND SPARE ME ***NAUGHT***--

--OR I SHALL ***IN-CREASE*** THE UNFETTERED FURY OF THIS ***STORM-WIND*** THAT DOTH HOLD THEE PRISONER, TILL IT DO TEAR THEE ***ASUNDER***--

--AYE, E'EN IF THE ***GOD OF THUNDER*** MUST PERISH IN THE MAELSTROM HE SHALL CREATE!

SO BE IT--AS **EYE** RECALL LORD ODIN SAYING, SO MANY TIMES BEFORE, WHEN **EYE** WAS PART OF HIM.

BUT, **EYE** AM NO ***LONGER*** A PART OF HIM-- SO **EYE** AM NO MORE BOUND BY CERTAIN UNBREAKABLE ***OATHS*** WHICH HE HAS SWORN, BOTH TO HIMSELF AND TO THE ***HIGHER POWERS*** OF THE UNIVERSE.

HIGHER POWERS!?

WHAT POWER CAN THERE BE THAT IS MIGHTIER THAN THE ***ALL-FATHER*** HIMSELF?

SURELY, THOU SPEAKEST NOT OF THUNDERBOLT-HURLING ***ZEUS***-- NOR E'EN OF THE ***CELESTIALS***, THOSE COSMIC ENIGMAS WHO DO CLAIM 'TWAS ***THEY*** DID MAKE HEAVEN AND EARTH.

OR BE ***THAT*** THY DIRE SECRET, EYE OF ODIN?

ARE THE CELESTIALS INDEED THE ***CREATORS OF MANKIND*** THEY DO HOLD THEMSELVES TO BE?

BUT THEN WHAT OF ***OUR*** LEGENDS, WHICH SAY THAT THE ***GODS OF ASGARD*** DID FASHION MAN AND MIDGARD?

AND WHAT OF THE LEGENDS WHICH GIVE THAT GLORY TO ***OLYMPUS***?

YOU ARE FULL OF QUESTIONS, THOR-- BUT **EYE** SHALL ANSWER ONLY THE ONE YOU FIRST DID ***ASK***.

NOR CAN **EYE** DO EVEN ***THAT***, UNLESS YOU SURRENDER ***YOUR*** WILL TO ***MINE***!

SURRENDER-- AFTER I DID ***DEFEAT*** THEE?

OFTTIMES, GOLDMANE, THERE IS TRUE **VICTORY** ONLY IN TOTAL SURRENDER.

I SENSE, SOMEHOW, AN UNKNOWN **WISDOM** IN THE WORDS THOU DOST SEND TEEMING INTO MY MIND.

THUS I **SHALL** SURRENDER MY WILL TO THINE FOR THE MOMENT-- BECAUSE I TRUST THAT I BE **STRONG** ENOW TO SURVIVE, IF THOU DOST ACT IN **TREACHERY.**

DO WHAT THOU WILT, EYE OF ODIN!

EYE DO NOT ACT TREACHEROUSLY, THUNDER GOD, AS YOU SOON WILL SEE.

BUT, BEFORE YOU CAN SEE WHAT **EYE** HAVE SEEN, AND YOU HAVE **NOT**--

--YOU FIRST MUST **RELIVE**, IN THE DEEPEST PART OF YOUR MIND, ALL THAT WHICH **YOU** HAVE SEEN-- **THUS!**

BY YMIR'S BEARD! I SEE!!

YES, **SEE** INDEED, AND **MORE** THAN SEE--

RELIVE ONCE MORE THE **FALSE RAGNAROK,** SO LATELY FOUGHT--

--WHEREIN, IN DEFIANCE OF THE **MYTHS OF THE NORSEMEN** WHO ONCE WORSHIPPED YOUR KIND, YOU SLEW THE DREADED **MIDGARD SERPENT** WHICH WOULD HAVE DEVOURED ALL OF ASGARD!

ALREADY YOU **SUSPECT** THIS WAS POSSIBLE BECAUSE YOUR SIRE HAD CREATED LIKEWISE A **SECOND THOR**-- A HUMAN BEING, IMBUED WITH YOUR **ESSENCE.**

BUT, YOU SUSPECT ONLY THE SLIGHTEST **FRACTION** OF THE TRUTH, EVEN NOW.

*SEE ISSUES #274-278. --ROY.

LOOK BACK FURTHER, TO THAT FALSE RAGNAROK'S **BEGINNING**-- WHEN THE HORDES OF **HELA** DID RAGE AT THE GATES OF THY GLEAMING REALM--

--PROVOKED, AS YOU LEARNED LATER, BY **LORD ODIN** HIMSELF--*

--WHEN HE ALLOWED **BALDER THE BRAVE** TO BE BASELY **SLAIN!**

NAY! BALDER BE NOT DEAD--

--BUT RATHER IN A ***TWILIGHT STATE*** 'TWIXT LIFE AND DEATH!

TRUE ENOUGH, BUT THAT IS NEITHER HERE NOR THERE... FOR **NOW.**

SUFFICE IT TO SAY THAT BALDER WAS... **LAID LOW**... BY THE ARROW OF **HODER**, WHO BUT FULFILLED EVIL **LOKI'S** PLAN.

NOW LOOK ***FURTHER BACK*** IN TIME...

...PAST LESSER ADVENTURES, SUCH AS OCCURRED WHEN YOU AND THE WARRIOR-GODDESS **SIF** DID BATTLE WITH SUCH AS THE **GREY GARGOYLE** AND HIS COSMIC CORSAIRS...

...OR WHEN YOU RESCUED YOUR EARTHLY LADY LOVE **JANE FOSTER** DID BATTLE SIDE BY SIDE WITH **ULIK** AGAINST THE FORCES OF **ZOLTARR** AND THE **TROLL KING.**

JANE FOSTER WAS A **DIFFERENT** PERSON, THEN, FROM WHAT SHE HAD BEEN BEFORE...

FOR, WHEN ON HER **DEATHBED** MONTHS EARLIER, SHE HAD BEEN SAVED ONLY BY THE SELFLESS ACTION OF THE LADY **SIF** HERSELF--

--WHEN SIF SENT **HER OWN LIFE-FORCE** INTO THE FAST-FAILING FORM OF THE MORTAL WOMAN.

SHE HAD SEEN HOW MUCH YOU **LOVED** JANE FOSTER, DESPITE YOUR DEEP FEELINGS FOR THE GODDESS...

...WHEN THE MORTAL WOMAN LAY DYING...

BEFORE THAT TIME, **SIF** HAD SERVED AS YOUR COMRADE IN BATTLE EVEN ON PLANET EARTH.

AH... I SEE YOU FIND IT **VEXING** TO WITNESS EACH OF THESE MIND-IMAGES STREAKING PAST YOU IN THE **OPPOSITE ORDER** FROM THAT IN WHICH THEY TRULY HAPPENED.

BUT, IT CANNOT BE HELPED.

RELAX NOW... LET THE INTERVENING YEARS WASH PAST YOU, LIKE SEA-SPRAY PAST THE PROW OF SHIPS THE **VIKINGS** ONCE DID SAIL...

...TILL YOU BEHOLD YOURSELF, EMBRACING FOR THE **FIRST TIME**, THE LADY **SIF**, WHO HAS BECOME YOUR BELOVED!

LORD ODIN HAD JUST CAUSED YOU TO **FORGET** THE MORTAL **JANE FOSTER**, WHOM HE HAD LONG FORBIDDEN YOU TO LOVE...

...AND SENT HER HURTLING BACK TO **EARTH**...

...AFTER SHE HAD PROVED SHE LACKED THE **COURAGE** TO BECOME A TRUE **GODDESS OF ASGARD**, AND HAD ALL BUT PERISHED.

THINK NOT **TOO** HARSHLY OF YOUR SIRE, HOWEVER, THUNDER GOD. AFTER ALL...

...HAD SHE NOT HAD HER **CHANCE**, WHEN SENT AS A TEST TO FACE THE CREATURE CALLED ONLY... **THE UNKNOWN**?

AND WERE **YOU** YOURSELF NOT FORCED TO **RESCUE** HER?

AT LEAST THE ALL-FATHER GAVE HER AMPLE **OPPORTUNITY** TO BECOME THE **WORTHY BRIDE** OF YOU, HIS **SON**...

...BY TRANSFORMING HER, FOR A SHORT TIME, INTO **IMMORTAL GUISE.**

OR WAS THERE **MORE**, PERHAPS, TO ODIN'S ACTIONS THAN MET **YOUR** EYE?*

*PRECEDING SCENES ARE FROM VARIOUS ISSUES, CULMINATING IN THE CLASSIC ISSUE #136. --ROY.

NOW, BEHOLD A SCENE **EYE** CAN SENSE SEEMS **ALIEN** TO YOU NOW: THOSE DAYS WHEN YOU FOUGHT PRIMARILY ON **EARTH**, AND THOUGHT OF YOURSELF AS ONE OF THOSE CALLED --A **SUPERHERO**.

YOU FOUGHT BOTH ALONE, AND WITH THOSE WHO CALLED THEMSELVES **AVENGERS**...

...THOUGH EVEN THEN, THERE WERE **GODS** AMONG BOTH FRIENDS AND FOES.

STILL FURTHER BACK-- AND SUDDENLY YOU MUST BE **STUNNED** TO SEE YOUR ASGARDIAN FORM **VANISHED**--TRAPPED, FOR YEARS, INSIDE THE MORTAL FORM OF **DR. DONALD BLAKE**.*

WHA--!?

*JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #83. --R.T.

FOR SOME TIME, YOU WONDERED **WHERE** YOU, THE GOD OF THUNDER, REPOSED **BEFORE** THAT DAY WHEN A LAME PHYSICIAN FOUND A STRANGE **WALKING-STICK** IN A SCANDINAVIAN CAVE.

WERE YOU REALLY **BLAKE**... OR WAS HE TRULY **YOU**?

YOU FOUND YOU HAD **NO REAL MEMORIES** AS DONALD BLAKE GOING BACK FURTHER THAN THE DAY YOU SUDDENLY APPEARED AS A STUDENT AT THE **STATE COLLEGE OF MEDICINE**.

LATER, YOU REMEMBERED WHY...

...WHEN **LORD ODIN** LIFTED THE VEIL, AND REVEALED IT WAS **HE** WHO HAD SENT YOU TO THE WORLD YOU CALL **MIDGARD**...

...TO TEACH YOU **HUMILITY**, HE SAID.

THOUGH THOU ART SUPREME IN THY POWER AND THY PRIDE, THOU MUST KNOW **WEAKNESS**... THOU MUST FEEL **PAIN!**

WHY MUST I **RELIVE** ALL THIS, EYE OF ODIN?

THERE DOTH SEEM **NO PURPOSE** TO--

YOU LEFT THAT TO **ME** TO DECIDE, REMEMBER, **SON** OF ODIN.

AND I SAY, WE STILL HAVE **TWO MILLENNIA** OF VISIONS TO GO THROUGH, THOUGH IN AN **INSTANT'S TIME.**

AH, AND **WHAT** VISIONS THEY ARE, OF WHAT **ADVENTURES!**

IT WOULD ALMOST BE **WORTH** BECOMING A MERE PART OF ODIN AGAIN, TO RELIVE THEM **MYSELF.**

YOUR EXPLOITS THEN CONCERNED THEMSELVES, IN THE MAIN, WITH THE REALMS OF **GODS** AND OF GODLIKE **BEINGS**...

...AS YOU REVELED IN THE FULL BLOOM OF YOUR OWN **GODHOOD**, AND IN THE COMPANY OF **OTHERS** ONLY A LITTLE LESSER THAN YOURSELF!

YOU SEE AGAIN THAT MYSTIC MOMENT WHEN, ENRAGED BY THE WOUNDING OF BALDER, YOU **FIRST** LIFTED HIGH THE ENCHANTED **URU HAMMER**...

LET THE STORM GIANTS BEWARE!

YET, THAT IS ONLY A BLINK OF THE COSMIC EYELASH AWAY FROM YOUR **CHILDHOOD STRUGGLES** TO LIFT GREAT MJOLNIR...

AFTER EACH DEED OF VALOR, MY SON, THOU ART ABLE TO LIFT THE HAMMER A LITTLE **HIGHER**...TILL FINALLY, ONE DAY...

...OR FROM THAT **DARKER** DAY...

...WHEN ODIN, IN A MOMENT REEKING OF FOOLISHNESS, ADOPTED **LOKI**, THE INFANT STORM GIANT...

...AS HIS OWN **STEP-SON.**

BUT, THERE WAS A **BRIGHTNESS** TO MATCH THAT BLACK MISTAKE...

...**YOUR** BIRTH, THOR-- SON TO **LORD ODIN** AND ONE WHO LAY SHADOWED IN DARKNESS.

YOUR MEMORIES, OBVIOUSLY, GO NO FURTHER **BACK**...

STILL, LOCKED WITHIN YOU ARE YET **SECRETS** WHICH YOU YOURSELF HAVE NEVER KNOWN... SECRETS YOU HAVE INHERITED FROM THE PRIMAL MIND OF THE **ALL-FATHER.**

DO YOU SEE, IN YOUR MENTAL EYE, THE **WAY** TO THESE SECRETS, THUNDERER?

'TIS LIKE A LOOMING, GARGANTUAN **DOOR**-- THICK PORTALS, AND SECURED BY A MASSIVE **LOCK!**

YOU **KNOW**, THEN, WHAT YOU MUST **DO!**

AYE! MY PATH IS **CLEAR**...

I MUST NEEDS *SMASH ASUNDER* YON LOCK, THAT I MAY--

BY HEIMDALL'S HORN! NOW, TWO MASTODONIC *HANDS* DO GRIP THE DOOR FAST--

SKAK!

--MORE POWERFULLY THAN E'ER DID THE *LOCK!*

YON BEHEMOTH BE SO *AWESOME* OF ASPECT-- MAY-HAP I SHOULD *SEAL FAST* THE DOOR ONCE MORE, RATHER THAN *UNLEASH* WHAT DOTH CROUCH BEHIND IT.

BUT *NAY!* I HAVE OWNED MY-SELF *ODIN'S SON* AGAIN.

THUS, TILL I DO KNOW IF HE BE *ENEMY* OF MIDGARD, OR NO--

--I MUST BE *WORTHY* OF MY LINEAGE!

WHOA!

HAH! YON COLOSSUS NOW DOTH *VANISH*-- AS ASSUREDLY AS DID THE PHANTOMS CONJURED BY THE EYE OF ODIN.

I NEED ONLY STRIDE *BEYOND* THE DOOR, TO DISCERN WHAT--

WELL, CONQUEROR MINE? DO YOU SEE WHAT YOUR *ASTRAL DOUBLE* SEES?

I *DO,* ORB--

--AND IT DOTH *SHOCK* ME BEYOND ALL POWER OF WORDS!

'T'IS RAGNAROK-- THAT DAY WE DO CALL THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS!

BUT NAY! THOUGH I DO RECOGNIZE BOTH GODS AND GIANTS-- WARRIORS AND TROLLS-- AYE, THE VERY FENRIS WOLF DEVOURING WHOE'ER DOTH BAR HIS WAY--

--THESE BE NOT THE GODS OR GIANTS I HAVE E'ER KNOWN!

SPEAK, EYE! BE THIS SOME TERRIBLE PARODY OF THE GODS' OWN DUSK THOU HAST CONJURED UP, MERELY TO MOCK ME?

HARDLY, THUNDERER. BUT, LET US PULL BACK A BIT, BOTH IN TIME AND IN SPACE...

...AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE NOW!

'TIS ASGARD-- OR ELSE A PLACE MOST LIKE IT!

BUT AGAIN, IT DOTH HAVE A MORE EARTHLY LOOK-- AYE, MUCH AS MIDGARD ITSELF DID APPEAR IN THOSE CENTURIES-AGO DAYS WHEN WE WERE WORSHIPPED BY REAVERS OF THE SEAS!

CORRECT! THIS IS THAT OTHER ASGARD...THE ASGARD OF EARTHLY LEGEND, OF MIDGARD'S MYTHS!

SEE NOW THE EVENTS THAT LED UP TO THE RAGNAROK YOU JUST BEHELD!

HURL YOUR WEAPONS AT ME, BROTHERS!

THEY'LL NOT HURT BALDER!

NO...

YES!

GO ON, HODER-- HURL YOUR MISTLE-TOE WAND AT BALDER!

SINCE YOU'RE BLIND, I WILL GUIDE YOUR HAND.

YES, LOKI... SINCE ALL THINGS HAVE SWORN AN OATH NOT TO HARM THE GOD OF LIGHT.

WATCH NOW, THOR! DOES THIS LOOK... FAMILIAR?

TH-THAT SCREAM! BALDER'S VOICE! WH-WHAT HAVE I DONE?

WHAT HAVE I DONE?

THOUGH BLIND HODER'S STAFF WAS ONLY A BLUNT INSTRUMENT IN THIS WORLD-- STILL IT PIERCED THIS BALDER'S CHEST--

--BECAUSE THE LOWLY MISTLETOE, OF ALL THINGS ALONE, HAD NOT BEEN BOUND BY THE OATH!

BY THE WAY-- DO YOU RECOGNIZE THAT RED-BEARDED SWAIN STANDING BESIDE THIS ASGARD'S ODIN?

FATHER! BALDER IS TRULY-- DEAD!

IF I CANNOT RELEASE HIM FROM DEATH'S HOLD-- THEN RAGNAROK MUST SURELY FOLLOW!

AND, IN THIS LONG-AGO WORLD, RAGNAROK DID FOLLOW-- AS THIS EARLIER LOKI STEERS THE HELLSHIP, THEN LEADS ITS VILE CREW AGAINST ASGARD ITSELF...

COME, BROTHERS! VICTORY IS OURS THIS DAY!

THEN, BRANDISHING HIS GREAT SPEAR GUNGNIR, AND GIRT WITH HIS OWN GOLDEN HELMET, LORD ODIN LEADS THE HOSTS OF ASGARD AND VALHALLA ONE LAST TIME...

DWARF-FORGED MJOLNIR WILL SPEAK FOR THOR!

FORWARD, AESIR*! SLAY THE HORDES OF HELL!

*THE NORSE GODS WERE CALLED THE AESIR, UNLIKE OUR OWN FAR-FAMED ASGARDIANS.--R.T.

YET, THOUGH THE ALL-FATHER SLAYS MANY OF THE INVADING GIANTS, AT LAST THE FIERCE, GIGANTIC **FENRIS WOLF** LEAPS AT HIM--

RARRR

--GAPING **JAWS** SPREAD WIDE ENOUGH TO SWALLOW THE VERY **STARS** THEMSELVES--

--AND LORD ODIN IS **NO** MORE!

FATHER! NO!!

THIS KING OF GODS, HOWEVER, HAS MORE BLOOD-SONS THAN **ONE**, ONLY-- AMONG THEM, MAGNIFICENT **VIDAR**, SKILLED WITH BLADE--

--WHO NOW SPRINGS FORWARD TO **BEHEAD** THE HUGE BEAST WITH HIS INVINCIBLE **SWORD!***

DIE, HOUND OF HELL!

ALREADY, HOWEVER, THE WOLF HAS **DEVOURED** LORD ODIN-- TAKEN HIM INTO HIS BOTTOMLESS **MAW!**

YYYII

*IN OTHER ACCOUNTS, VIDAR SLEW THE FENRIS WOLF WITH HIS BARE HANDS...BUT THIS IS A **FAMILY** COMICBOOK. --ROY.

THE DOOM OF GODS AND GIANTS **BOTH** IS WRIT LARGE, NOW, IN FLAMING LETTERS THAT CANNOT BE ERASED--

--AS **LOKI** FACES STALWART **HEIMDALL** ATOP THIS ASGARD'S RAIN-BOW BRIDGE--

--WITH RESULTS **FATAL** TO EACH!

UNHNH

ARRGH

I KNOW THAT, IN **YOUR** OWN FUTURE RAGNAROK, THUNDER GOD, IT IS WRITTEN THAT YOU AND LOKI WILL FACE EACH OTHER--

BUT, IN THIS RAGNAROK OF WHICH **SNORRI STURLUSON** AND THE **VOLUSPA** DID SPEAK, IT IS THE VENOM-SPEWING **MIDGARD SERPENT** WHO SEEKS YOU OUT FOR THE **FINAL BATTLE**--

PERHAPS HE'S **NOT** YOUR EQUAL, AS HE APPEARS-- FOR, LIKE AN AVENGING DRAGON, THE GREAT SERPENT SWOOPS DOWN TO SINK VAST **FANGS** INTO THE GOD'S FLESH--

OR RATHER, IT IS HE THAT **OTHER THOR** FACES.

--AND LOOKS FAIR TO **SWALLOW** BOTH THOR, AND THAT SHORTER-HANDLED **HAMMER** HE WIELDS!

BACK--YOU DEVIL--OF THE OUTER GULFS--

BACK TO THE DISMAL *DEPTHS* THAT SPAWNED YOU!

THRAK!

HE HAS SNATCHED *TRIUMPH* FROM DEFEAT'S DARK JAWS-- OR SO IT SEEMS--

HOWEVER, AS THE MIDGARD SERPENT FALLS FOR THE LAST TIME, IT SPEWS FORTH DEADLY *VENOM*--

--VENOM LIKE THAT WHICH *ALREADY* COURSES THICKLY THROUGH THE THUNDER GOD'S MIGHTY FRAME--

NO! MUST-- FIGHT ON--!

MUST--

--AND THIS THOR *DIES*, NOR IS THERE ANY BRIGHT *VALHALLA* LEFT TO RECEIVE HIS SOUL.

HOW DOES IT *FEEL*, ODINSON, TO BEHOLD YOUR OTHERWORLDLY COUNTERPART *SLAIN*--

--BY THAT SELF-SAME MONSTER *YOU* YOURSELF MUST FACE ONE DAY?

I HAVE BEHELD *MANY* A DEATH, O'ER THE EONS--AND I HOPE I BEAR MINE OWN EQUALLY WELL.

GET ON WITH THY *TALE!*

VERY WELL! NOW, THE DEMON *SURT*-- ALSO CALLED *SURTUR*-- HAS SLAIN THE GREAT GOD *FREY*--

--AND HE *RISES* NOW LIKE A BIRTHING MOUNTAIN--

--TO HURL **FIRE** AND **LAVA** OVER ALL THIS SCENE OF COSMIC CARNAGE!

THE LEGENDS OF THIS OTHER RAGNAROK SAY THAT THE **EARTH** ITSELF IS RAVAGED BY SURT, BUT HERE, IF NOWHERE ELSE, THEY **ERR.**

IT IS THE **NETHER REALMS** THAT PERISH, AND THEY ALONE!

BY THE FROSTED BEARD OF YMIR--'TIS **ENOW!**

THUS DID **RAGNAROK** OCCUR, IN THIS LONG-AGO TIME.

BUT, E'EN IF THOU DOST SAY TRULY-- **WHEN** DID IT HAPPEN, ORB?

WHEN--AYE, AND **WHERE?**

LOOK ON, THUNDERER...

BEHOLD NOW, AS THE MOLTEN ROCK WHICH WAS ASGARD **COOLS**-- AND A **FIGURE** STIRS IN THE MIST CREATED BY THE MEETING OF FIRE AND ICE.

OR RATHER, **SEVERAL** FIGURES STIR-- THOSE **AESIR** WHO ALONE DID NOT FALL IN THE LAST GREAT BATTLE--

AND FOREMOST AMONG THESE IS **BALDER,** GOD OF LIGHT-- RETURNING FROM THE **HELL** INTO WHICH HE HAD DESCENDED AFTER HIS DEATH AT HODER'S HAND.

COME...MY BROTHERS...

THEY ARE **NINE** IN ALL, THESE SURVIVORS OF BRIGHT ASGARD. LET ME **NAME** THEM, FOR NOT ALL ARE KNOWN TO YOU:

BESIDE BALDER STANDS WOUNDED **VILI**, BROTHER TO ODIN... WHILE ODIN'S OTHER BROTHER **VE** IS HELPED BY **VIDAR** AND **VALI**, SONS TO THE PERISHED ALL-FATHER.

HOENIR, LIKE VILI AND VE ONE OF THE ELDEST OF AESIR, CARRIES BLIND **HODER**-- WHO LIKE BALDER HAS RETURNED FROM THE REALM OF THE DEAD...

...WHILE **MAGNI** AND **MODI**, BOTH SONS OF THE VANQUISHED **THOR**, SIT CONTEMPLATING THE GLEAMING SPHERE WHICH SEEMS TO SPIN BELOW.

TELL ME WHAT YOU *SEE*-- WHAT *REMAINS!* BALDER--?

MIDGARD STILL LIVES, HODER... AND SOON, *ASGARD* ITSELF WILL BE HABITABLE AGAIN.

SURELY NOW, *EVIL* HAS PERISHED... AND A *GOLDEN AGE* SHALL SOON BEGIN!

HOPEFUL BUT **FOOLISH** WORDS, GOOD BALDER!

THUS CAME **RAGNAROK** TO THE AESIR, LONG AGO.

BUT *WHEN* DID THIS HAPPEN, EYE OF ODIN?

AND HOW DOES THIS ANSWER MY QUESTION CONCERNING THE *TREACHERY OF MY FATHER?*

YOU **STILL** DON'T COMPREHEND?

I AM *NO FOOL*, ORB--I AM A *SCION OF ASGARD!*

AND, IN THIS MOMENT-- I BE AN *ANGRY* ASGARDIAN, INDEED!

TELL ME WHAT I WOULD KNOW-- OR ELSE OUR *BATTLE* DOTH BEGIN ANEW!

VERY WELL! *EYE* WILL TELL YOU.

LOOK ONCE MORE WITH YOUR *MIND'S DARK EYE--!*

WHAT DO YOU **SEE** THERE?

THAT OTHER ASGARD-- ***AFLAME*** AS IT WAS BEFORE!

VERY GOOD!...

NOW GAZE DOWN AT THE **EARTH** BELOW... SO FAR BELOW, YET IN **ANOTHER PLANE,** AS WELL.

A SINGLE SCENE SHALL SUFFICE, I TRUST, MORE THAN ANY OTHER, TO REVEAL TO YOU THE **TIME,** THE **ERA,** OF THE EVENTS JUST WITNESSED...

THERE, SON OF ODIN! **NOW** DO YOU KNOW **WHEN** THAT EARLIER, OTHER RAGNAROK OCCURRED?

NEARLY... **TWO THOUSAND YEARS** AGO...!

CORRECT! AND NOW, **EYE** SHALL REVEAL HOW ALL THIS RELATES TO **YOU**...!

NEXT: **NEW ASGARD FOR OLD!** --ALSO-- ***THE RE-BIRTH OF ODIN!***

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THE MIGHTY

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NEW ASGARDS FOR OLD!

NINE ELDER GODS! ALL THAT REMAIN OF AN **OLDER ASGARD**, THE FALL AND RUIN OF WHICH THOR HAS WITNESSED IN HIS MIND'S DARK EYE.*

NINE ELDER GODS! ALL, SAVE ONLY **BALDER** POSSESSED OF NAMES WHICH OUR GOLD-TRESSED THUNDER GOD DOES NOT REMEMBER...

...AND EVEN THAT NAME BELONGS TO A FACE AND FORM HE HAS **NE'ER SEEN BEFORE.**

SMALL WONDER, THEN, THAT THE SON OF ODIN CRIES OUT--

IMPOSTERS!

THEY BE BASE **IMPOSTERS**, ALL--

*AND WHICH **YOU** SAW LAST ISSUE, RIGHT? --R.T.

--OR ELSE, THEY BE SOME E'EN BASER *LIE* THOU HAST PLACED IN MY MIND TO *DE-CEIVE* ME, THOU *EYE OF ODIN!*

WELL? WHICH *BE* IT? *ANSWER ME!*

HAST THOU *BETRAYED* THY VOW TO SHOW ME WHY THE *ALL-FATHER*, OF WHOM THOU WERT ONCE A PART, DID SPEAK OF *SLAYING* ME, IN A LONG-AGO AGE?

YOU WISH THAT EYE WAS LYING TO YOU, DO YOU NOT, THUNDERER?

*BUT YOU KNOW, IN YOUR HEART OF HEARTS, THAT I DO **NOT.***

THEN HOW ARE YONDER NINE SURVIVORS OF THAT *OTHER ASGARD* RELATED TO THAT ASGARD *I* DO KNOW AND REVERE?

*TO ILLUSTRATE THAT, ODINSON, LET ME SHOW YOU AN IMAGE NOT SO MUCH OF A **THING** **WHICH IS**... AS THE **WAY THINGS ARE:***

*WITNESS-- THE **CELESTIAL AXIS!***

*MANY NAMES HAS IT HAD: THE **ZODIAC**, WITH ITS 2160 YEAR PROGRESSION*. OR, TO MODERN SCIENCE OF EARTH, A MERE **WOBBLING** OF EARTH'S OWN AXIS, AND NOTHING MORE.*

*BUT IT IS **MUCH** MORE... TO **YOU**, IF NOT TO EARTH ITSELF.*

*REGRETFULLY, A FULLER EXPLANATION OF *ZODIACAL PRECESSION* CAN ONLY BE PRINTED IN THIS ISSUE'S *LETTERS PAGE*...BUT THOSE AMONG YE WHO ALREADY KNOW ABOUT SUCH THINGS, OR WHO DON'T CARE, MAY READ ON.--ROY.

*EARTH IS, SYMBOLICALLY AT LEAST, AT THE **CENTER** OF THE CELESTIAL AXIS... AND SO, ON ANOTHER PLANE, IS YOUR OWN **ASGARD**, AND ITS MIGHTY WORLD TREE, **YGGDRASIL**.*

EH? THOU SAYEST, THEN, THAT ASGARD'S FATE AND EARTH'S BE *LINKED*, SOMEHOW...

...DESPITE MY FATHER'S ATTEMPTS TO *DENY* IT!?

*IN A WORD... **YES.***

LONG HAVE I *SENSED* AS MUCH...

YET, E'EN IF ALL THOU HAST SHOWN ME BE TRUE, WHAT HATH IT DO WITH *ODIN* HIMSELF?

THE ODIN OF THAT OTHER ASGARD I SAW ***SLAIN***-- VICTIM OF THE ***FENRIS WOLF***, AS FORE-TOLD IN THE MYTHS OF THE ***NORSEMEN***. AND--

NOT **MYTHS**, THOR-- BUT **MEMORIES**! REMEMBER-- ALL THAT **EYE** SHOWED YOU OCCURRED SOME **TWO THOUSAND YEARS AGO**.

AYE, AND I SHALL INCREASE THE VELOCITY OF THE ***WHIRL-WIND*** WHICH HOLDS THEE FAST, IF THOU DOST NOT SWIFTLY KEEP THY ***BARGAIN*** WITH ME!

YOU ARE **IMPATIENT**, THOR-- FOR, NOT WORTH THE **ASKING** IS THE QUERY THAT MAY BE ANSWERED IN A **SINGLE WORD**.

*IN YOUR OWN WAY, YOU'RE AS FIDGETY AS YONDER **DWARFLINGS** FROM WHOM **EYE** WRESTED THIS DESOLATE WORLD--*

*-- WHEN **EYE** CAME HERE, FRESH FROM BEING RIPPED BY ODIN FROM HIS OWN SKULL AND TOSSED INTO **MIMIR'S FIERY WELL**.*

*BUT **HOLD**! NOW WHAT ARE YOU DOING?*

THOU DOST ***MINCE WORDS***, ORB, FOR REASONS OF THINE OWN.

I THOUGHT MAYHAP A NEW ***THUNDERSTORM*** WOULD SHAKE THEE INTO ***CLARITY***.

*NO NEED FOR THAT. **EYE** WILL TELL YOU ALL **EYE** PROMISED.*

MANY ARE THE THINGS I MUST KNOW ERE I MAY REST, EYE--

THE SECRET OF ***ODIN'S OATH***, MADE TO THE STAR-SPAWNED ***CELESTIALS*** A MILLENNIUM AGONE--

--BUT ***MOST OF ALL***, AS I TOLD THEE, THAT WHICH MADE THE ALL-FATHER CRY OUT--

NAY! I'LL NOT SLAY MINE ONLY BLOODSON ***AGAIN!***

--THEN HURL HIS SACRED SPEAR ***GUNGNIR*** FROM HIM, LIKE UNTO A ***THING DESPISED!***

--THE CAUSE OF MINE O'ERWEENING LOVE FOR THE PLANET MEN CALL ***EARTH***--

THEN OPEN YOUR MIND AGAIN, THUNDER GOD, AND EYE WILL COME INSIDE ONCE MORE.

AYE...!

SEE AGAIN THAT WORLD OF TWO MILLENNIA AGO...

NOW TURN YOUR INNER EYE FROM EARTH...

...TO THAT MOLTEN ROCK WHICH IS ALL THAT REMAINS OF THE ELDER ASGARD.

WATCH, WHILE TIME STANDS ALL BUT STILL...

...AND THE RUINS OF THAT ONCE-GLEAMING REALM ARE WASHED BY STORMS, LASHED BY LIGHTNINGS,

NOW, SEE ALL THE THINGS BEGIN TO GROW AGAIN, TILL ALL TRACES OF THAT ELDER ASGARD ARE LOST TO VIEW...

...FADING EVEN IN THE MEMORIES OF THE NINE WHO STRIDE ACROSS THE PLAIN OF IDA.

WHAT MAD GOD'S FOLLY IS THIS, BALDER?

WHERE HAVE WE TO GO, OR WHAT TO DO...SAVE OFF SOMEWHERE TO PERISH, AS OUR HOMELAND DID?*

YOU LACK SPINE, OLD VE, FOR A BROTHER OF ODIN.

ODIN IS DEAD.

BUT WE ARE NOT, AND SOMETHING DRAWS ME ON.

HOLD, BALDER...

*IN THE FIRES OF RAGNAROK, LAST ISSUE.--R.T.

THOUGH BLIND, I TOO SENSE THE NEARNESS OF SOMETHING--AN ALL-POWERFUL AURA WHICH--

HOENIR! LOOK OUT!

EH?

THE GOD OF LIGHT HAS CLEAR VISION, AS EVER.

WHAT FIGURINES ARE THESE, SO DELICATELY CARVED?

I DO NOT KNOW...

...BUT THEY LIE STREWN ABOUT THE PLAIN IN SUCH *PROFUSION*, AS IF PUT HERE BY SOME *PLAN*--!

LOOK YOU, BALDER! THEY ARE FIGURES OF OUR *DEAD FELLOW-GODS*...AND OF OUR *FALLEN FOES*, AS WELL!

YES. YOU HAVE *LOKI*, AND *ODIN* HIMSELF...

AND SEE-- HERE IS THE *FENRIS WOLF*-- AND *THOR*, LACKING ONLY HIS DREADED *STORM HAMMER*.

COME, BALDER... HOENIR. DO NOT OUR *LEGENDS* TELL US THAT, AFTER RAGNAROK, WE SHALL LIVE IN A *GOLDEN REALM* FOREVER?

WE MUST PRESS ON, TILL WE DO *FIND* IT!

BUT, THE OTHER TWO AESIR SCARCELY HEAR HIM, SO ABSORBED ARE THEY IN THE FANTASTIC FIGURINES.

MEANWHILE, *MODI* AND *MAGNI*, THE TWO SONS OF THAT *THOR* WHO DIED IN THE ELDER ASGARD, HAVE WANDERED AHEAD, AS RECKLESS AS EVER WAS THEIR SIRE...

VE WAS RIGHT, MAGNI. WE *MILL ABOUT*, BUT THERE IS NOWHERE TO GO.

I KNOW...YET, I FEEL AN *INNER CALL*, JUST AS BALDER DID,

ALREADY, *MEMORIES* OF ASGARD FADE FROM MY MIND, LEAVING NO TRACE. SOON, I FEAR I SHALL HAVE FULLY *FORGOTTEN* OUR FORMER GLORY.

PERHAPS...BUT *THERE'S* SOMETHING WE BOTH REMEMBER, EH, MY BROTHER?

THE HAMMER OF OUR FATHER *THOR*!

IT WAS THE *MIGHTIEST* WEAPON OF ITS DAY, DESPITE ITS TOO-SHORT HANDLE...BUT ONLY OUR *SIRE* COULD LIFT--*EH*?

WE CAN LIFT IT NOW, IF WE ACT TOGETHER-- *SEE*?

MASTERLESS NOW, THE ENCHANTED MALLET IS *OURS*!

DARE *WE* USE IT-- AS THE *WEAPON* IT ONCE WAS?

WITH IT, WE COULD *LORD IT* OVER OUR BROTHER AESIR...!

THE VERY FACT THAT YOU *SAY* THAT PROVES THAT SUCH A THING CAN ONLY BE A *DANGER* TO US ALL.

FOR, *FORCE* MUST EVER *BEGET* FORCE, IN ITS TURN.

YES! WE'VE *NO NEED* FOR WEAPONS, IN THIS IDYLLIC PLACE.

THEN LET US HURL IT *AWAY*--TO A PLACE WHERE IT CAN CAUSE *NO HARM*--

--THE WORLD CALLED *MIDGARD!*

AN INTRIGUING TALE, EYE OF ODIN... THOUGH THE *MJOLNIR* OF WHICH THOU SPEAK-EST CANNOT BE THE HAMMER I WEAR UPON MY SIDE.

CANNOT BE, AND *IS* NOT, THOR.

STILL, THAT MALLET IS NOT WITHOUT BEARING ON THE *TALE* EYE AM TELLING...

FOR, SHORT HANDLE AND ALL, IT PLUMMETED DOWNWARD TO THE *EARTH* TOWARD WHICH IT HAD BEEN SO POWERFULLY THROWN BY THE SONS OFTHOR...

...TOWARD A GREAT *RIVER* IN A PLACE WHICH WOULD ONE DAY BE CALLED *EUROPE*...

...A RIVER THAT WILL BE NAMED... THE **RHINE!**

WITH SUCH IMPACT DOES IT LAND, THAT IT **ALTERS THE COURSE** OF THE STREAM, FOR ALL TIME.

MORE THAN THE RIVER, HOWEVER, THE **HAMMER** ITSELF IS CHANGED IN PASSING FROM THE RUINS OF THE ELDER ASGARD INTO THE EARTH-PLANE.

TELL ME WHAT NOW YOU **SEE**, ODINSON!

THERE BE-- A **GLOW** AMID THE WINDING RIVER!

IT DOTH **BLIND**, LIKE UNTO THE VERY **SUN!**

WELL SAID! FOR, THIS EARLIER MJOLNIR HAS INDEED BEEN TRANSFORMED IN ITS PASSAGE, BY FORCES BEYOND COMPREHENSION, INTO... **GOLD.**

IN FUTURE DAYS, THIS HOARD SHALL BE KNOWN AS THE **RHINEGOLD**... AND IT SHALL STAND ON AN UN-REACHABLE PEAK AMID THE FLOWING WATERS OF THE RIVER RHINE.

MEANWHILE, LET US REJOIN THE DEAD ODIN'S BROTHERS, **VILI** AND LAME **VE**... AND ODIN'S SURVIVING SONS, **VIDAR** AND **VALI**... AS THEY MAKE A STARTLING DISCOVERY...

LOOK THERE-- AGAINST THAT ***STUMP!***

IT'S ODIN'S SPEAR ***GUNGNIR***, MIGHTIEST OF ALL WEAPONS!

SHOULD WE HURL IT AWAY IN THE NAME OF ***PEACE***, AS THOR'S SONS DID THEIR FATHER'S ***HAMMER?***

NO! I CLAIM THE HEAVEN-SPEAR, IN THE NAME OF THE ***SONS AND BROTHERS OF ODIN!***

BUT-- ITS POWER MAY ***CORRUPT*** US WHO ARE NOT AS ***STRONG*** AS WAS ODIN--!

THEN LET IT BELONG TO ***NO*** SINGLE AESIR, BUT TO ***WE FOUR***--

--WHO ARE THE ***CLOSEST*** IN BODY AND MIND TO ODIN HIMSELF!

NO GOOD... WILL COME OF THIS, I FEAR.

I NOTICE YOU ***GRASP-ING*** GUNGNIR, ALL THE SAME, VE!

WE ARE ***ALL*** GRABBING HOLD, VILI.

THIS IS FOOLISH! WE SHOULD-- WHAT!?

THE SPEAR! I-- I CANNOT LET GO OF IT!

NOR-- CAN ANY OF US--!

WHAT

IS

HAPPENING

TO

THE NEXT WORD, OF COURSE, WOULD BE "US"-- BUT NOW, SUDDENLY, AMID A DEAFENING BURST OF LIGHT, THERE IS NO "US"--

THERE IS ONLY--

--ODIN!

YES, THUNDER GOD--WIDE IS YOUR MIND'S EYE NOW, AND WIDE IT SHOULD BE-- FOR, THIS IS YOUR OWN SIRE WHO NOW STANDS UPON THE PLAIN OF IDA, HOLDING ALOFT GREAT GUNGNIR.

GONE FROM THE PLAIN ARE VILI AND VE... VIDAR AND VALI...

...LIKEWISE HOENIR AND HODER... MAGNI AND MODI... AND EVEN BRIGHT BALDER...

FROM THIS MOMENT, WHERE ONCE THE ELDER ASGARD STOOD...WHERE OF LATE GODS AND DEMONS FOUGHT AND DIED--

--NOW ONLY ODIN LIVES!!

AND MORE! HE *REMEMBERS!*

FOR, HE POSSESSES THE MEMORIES BOTH OF THE **FOUR ELDER GODS** OF WHOM HE IS COMPOSED-- AND, THROUGH THEM, OF THAT **OTHER ODIN** WHO WAS LORD OF THE EARLIER ASGARD.

WHAT BE *THIS*-- AT MY VERY *FEET?*

CHESSMEN, AYE-- THERE WERE SUCH PIECES HERE *ERE NOW*, I DO RECALL.

YET, THESE BE... *DIFFERENT*, SOMEHOW, FROM THOSE WHICH LAY STREWN ABOUT, BEFORE.

THESE BE *NOT* THOSE ELDER GODS THAT *OTHER ODIN* KNEW--

--THAT *ODIN* WHICH I BOTH *AM*, AND *AM NOT*--

--BUT FIGURES OF SOME *BRIGHTER* INNER HUE-- LESS LIKE *GODS*, MAYHAP-- YET MORE LIKE *HEROES!*

STRANGE! THE OTHER CHESSMEN-- AYE, AND ALL THE *NINE* WHO SURVIVED RAGNAROK-- HAVE *VANISHED* FROM THESE PLAINS OF IDA--

--TO BE *REFASHIONED* IN THESE GLEAM-ING IMAGES!

WELL, I AM *ODIN*-- NOT THE ODIN THAT WAS, BUT THE ODIN THAT *SHALL BE*, FROM NOW TILL FOREVERMORE!

GREAT SHALL BE MY *GLORY*-- GREATER FAR THAN E'ER DID BLAZE FROM THAT *ELDER ASGARD.*

AND WHAT DOTH IT *GAIN* A GOD, THAT HE BE *LORD* OF THE HEAVENS-- MASTER E'EN OF SACRED *GUNGNIR* WHICH BESTOWETH POWER--

--IF HE HATH NOT *FELLOW GODS*--

--AYE, AND *FOES* AS WELL--FOEMEN *WORTHY* OF A LORD OF LORDS!

MYTHS OF ANCIENT LANDS TELL OF WARRIORS AND DRAGONS WHICH SPRUNG FROM TINY **SEEDS**... BUT HERE, IT ACTUALLY **HAPPENED**...

AND, NEXT MOMENT, A WAVE OF GUNGNIR SEPARATED **WHEAT** FROM **CHAFF**, FOR MANY AN AGE!

BEGONE, YE GIANTS AND GHOULS AND GOBLINS!

FIND YE REPOSE AND SANCTUARY WHERE YE **MAY**...

'TIS THESE WHO BE THE ***OFFSPRING*** OF MY POWER WHO NOW DO CLAIM MY FULL ATTENTION!

TELL ME, MY CHILDREN--HAVE ***YE*** MEMORIES OF A PLACE CALLED... ***ASGARD***?

A-ASGARD, LORD ODIN?

THE ***ENCHANTRESS*** REMEMBERS NO SUCH PLACE.

I... DO SEEM TO KNOW THESE ***ABOUT*** ME... THEIR ***NAMES***, IF NAUGHT ELSE... BUT NOTHING OF AN "***ASGARD.***"

THY FAITHFUL ***BALDER*** DOTH ASK WITH GRIM ***HOGUN***--WHAT BE THIS "***ASGARD***" OF WHICH THOU DOST SPEAK, ALL-FATHER?

"***ALL-FATHER!***" THE NAME IS YOUNGER EVEN THAN THESE GODS, CREATED FULL-BLOWN BY THE POWER OF ODIN.

AND TRULY, IT IS THE MOST **FITTING** NAME OF ALL, EVEN THOUGH NONE OF THESE ARE ODIN'S **BLOODSONS**, AS YOU ARE, THUNDER GOD...

YET, EVEN THE **GODS** MUST HAVE THEIR **CREATION-LEGENDS**, IT SEEMS.

AND SO WERE BORN TALES OF HOW THE GREAT FROST-BEING **YMIR** GAVE BIRTH TO THE EVIL **GIANTS** AND THEIR PROGENY--

--OF HOW THE GODS CREATED **ASKE** AND **EMBLA**, THE FIRST HUMANS--

--AND THOSE **OTHER** MYTHS WHICH ALL ASGARDIANS BUT **YOU** STILL HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE!

WATCH ON, NOW, AS THESE GODS BEGIN TO BUILD A **NEW** ASGARD ON THE RUINS OF AN OLDER ONE THEY **NEVER KNEW**--

--AS THE LAST POSSIBLE VESTIGES OF **MEMORY** OF THAT ELDER GOD-HOME ARE ERASED, ERODED, **RE-PLACED** BY THOSE NEW MYTHS WITH WHICH THE ALL-FATHER HAS FORTIFIED THEIR MINDS.

AT LONG LAST, LORD ODIN STANDS-- STILL WITH **TWO** GOOD EYES, OF COURSE-- BEFORE THE SHATTERED, SPLINTERED REMAINS OF THE OLDER **RAINBOW BRIDGE**.

A GESTURE WITH **GUNGNIR**-- AND IT BEGINS TO **GROW** OUT-WARD, LIGHT ADDING FAST UPON SPECTRAL LIGHT--

--TILL IT STRETCHES DOWNWARD TOWARD **EARTH**, WHICH THE GODS CALL **MIDGARD**, ONCE AGAIN--

--YET, IN OTHER WAYS, FOR THE **FIRST** TIME.

NOW, TRULY, **ASGARD LIVES**-- A HOME FOR GLORY, GODS, AND GREATNESS!

ODIN LOOKS DOWN FROM HIS THRONE, AND IS **CONTENT** WITH WHAT HE AND HIS HAVE DONE, AND YET-- WELL, LET **HIM** SAY AGAIN THOSE WORDS HE UTTERED TWO MILLENNIA AGO:

'TIS A PROUD AND **LONELY** THING TO BE A FATHER UNTO GODS...

...A FATHER ONLY IN THE **ESSENCE**, BUT NOT IN THE **FLESH!**

I NEED SOMETHING **MORE.** I NEED... A **BLOODSON**...

...A CHILD BORN OF **WOMAN** OR **GODDESS**, NOT MERELY OF **MIND** AND SACRED **SPEAR!**

I COULD MATE WITH **FRIGGA**, MY BELOVED WIFE... BUT--

LORD ODIN-- I **KNOW** WHAT THOU DOST INTEND, BUT I BEG OF THEE--

SAY NO MORE, VIZIER! MY WILL BE **FIRM.**

I MUST HIE ME...TO **MIDGARD!**

THUS, GUNGNIR IN HAND, ASGARD'S MASTER PASSES FROM THE GLEAMING REALM HE HAS CREATED...

...TOWARD THAT **MORTAL SPHERE** WHICH SPINS, UNSUSPECTING, BELOW, HE--

HOLD, THOU EYE THAT ONCE WERT ODIN'S!

THOU MUST KNOW THAT, DESPITE ALL I HAVE SEEN THIS DAY, **NE'ER** HAVE I BEHELD MINE OWN **MOTHER**-- NAY, NOR E'EN KNOWN HER **NAME!**

THOU MUST TELL ME **MORE**, I DO IMPLORE THEE, OF--

THAT WAS NOT OUR **BARGAIN**, THUNDERER.

YOU ASKED TO KNOW OF THAT EARLIER **DEATH** WHICH ODIN DEALT YOU...NOT OF YOUR **BIRTH...**

THUS, LET TIME NOW PASS, TILL WE SEE AGAIN THE **RIVER RHINE...**

AYE...INTO WHICH THAT OTHER THOR'S **HAMMER** WAS HURLED, I KNOW!

FOR THE MOMENT, I'LL FOLLOW WHERE THOU DOST LEAD.

BUT, I VOW THERE SHALL BE A **RECKONING** MOST DIRE, IF I LEARN NOT WHAT I **WILL!**

EYE WILL DEAL WITH THAT WHEN THE TIME COMES, DEAR THOR.

AS EYE WERE SAYING: WE SEE AGAIN THE **RHINE-GOLD** ATOP ITS PEAK... BUT IT DOES NOT SIT **UNGUARDED**, IN ITS WAY...

HO, **VOGLINDA!** IS THIS HOW YOU GUARD THE GOLD TODAY?

IT'S **VELLGUNDA'S** TURN, FLOSSHILDA-- NOT MINE!

WHAT DIFFERENCE **HOW** OR **IF** THE GOLD IS GUARDED, MY SISTERS?

AFTER ALL, WHO WOULD **DARE** DO WHAT IT TAKES TO GAIN EVEN SUCH A PRIZE?

AYE, AND DEFY **ODIN'S EDICT**, AS WELL?

HO! LOOK TO THE **RHINEGOLD**, SISTERS!

HO, YOU FISH-LIKE MAIDS-- OR IS IT THE OTHER WAY AROUND?--

MAY I **JOIN** YOUR WATERY FROLIC?

LOOK TO THE **RHINEGOLD**, SISTERS!

THE **ALL-FATHER** WARNED OF SUCH A FOE.

FOE? YOU **WRONG** ME, LASSES.

I BUT WISH TO KNOW WHAT IT IS THAT **GLEAMS** FROM YONDER ROCK.

WATCH ME **TEASE** HIM, SISTERS!

THAT IS THE **RHINEGOLD**-- BUT IT'S NOT FOR YOU, OR **ANY** MORTAL.

NOT EVEN FOR POOR **ALBERICH**, GNOME OF THE **NIBELUNG** CLAN?

WHAT'S ITS **SECRET**, THEN?

WHY, FOOL-- IT'S SAID THAT **WORLD-CONQUEST** WILL BE THE PRIZE OF ONE WHO FORGES A **RING** OF THAT GOLDEN HORDE.

BUT **NO ONE** WOULD DO THAT.

OH? AND WHY **NOT**, PRETTY NIXIE?

BECAUSE ONLY ONE WHO **RENOUNCES LOVE**, IN ALL ITS MYRIAD FORMS, WILL EVER FIND **MAGIC** ENOUGH TO FORGE SUCH A RING.

AND WHO IS **MAD** ENOUGH TO RENOUNCE **LOVE**, WHICH RULES ALL THAT LIVES?

WHY, AS TO **THAT**...

...ALBERICH HAS NEVER KNOWN LOVE, SO CANNOT MISS IT!

SISTERS! STOP HIM!

HE GOES FOR THE GOLD!

HAH! NOW DO YOU FEAR, RHINEMAIDENS?

THEN TREMBLE MORE, WHEN YOU HEAR THESE WORDS--

I RENOUNCE LOVE--AYE, AND I CURSE IT!

CAPTURE THE THIEF! HURRY!

WHAT CAN WE DO--WHO CANNOT LEAVE OUR SACRED RIVER?

STOP, GNOME! HAVE YOU NO PITY?

ONE NEEDS BE CAPABLE OF LOVE TO FEEL PITY--

--AND I HAVE THUS RENOUNCED BOTH!

FAREWELL, FINNY ONES!

MEANWHILE, NOT FAR FROM ASGARD--IN A PLACE WHICH IS MORE THAN A PLACE, A TIME WHICH IS MORE THAN A TIME--TWO GIGANTIC FORMS LABOR UPON THICK RAMPARTS AND SPIRALING TOWERS THAT REACH TOWARD UNGLIMPSED HEAVENS...

WHY DOST THOU FRET SO, WIFE FRIGGA?

BEHOLD THOU HOW THE WALLS OF MY GREAT HALL VALHALLA DO RISE LIKE THE DAWN SUN!

I DO DESPISE ALL STORM-GIANTS, SUCH AS YONDER FAFNIR AND FASOLT--BUT THEY DO GOOD WORK, I'LL GRANT THEM THAT.

'TIS THEIR VERY CRAFTSMANSHIP THAT DOTH APPALL ME SO, LORD HUSBAND...

WHAT MEAN'ST THOU, WOMAN?

THOU KNOWEST *WELL!*

THOU DIDST PROMISE THEM *IDUNN,** GODDESS FAIR, FOR THEIR LABORS.

'TWAS A *VILLAIN-OUS* THING TO DO!

*TEUTONIC = FREIA.--R.T.

AND *THOU* KNOWEST WELL, I'D NE'ER HAVE MADE SUCH A VOW, BUT THAT *LOKI* DID PROMISE HE WOULD SEE THE PRICE NEED *NE'ER BE PAID!*

STILL, WHERE DOTH LOKI *HIDE* IN THIS HOUR?

I CONFESS, I'LL STAND *UNEASY* TILL I LEARN HOW HE MEANS TO--

FRET NO MORE, SIRE! THINE *ADOPTED SON* IS HERE...AND WITH HIM, THE FAIR *IDUNN!*

HELP ME, ALL-FATHER! HE DID BRING ME HERE MOST AGAINST MY *WILL!*

AH, BUT NOT AGAINST *OURS*, O VISION OF BEAUTY--

--*EH*, FASOLT? THOU HAST E'ER COMPLAINED OUR CAVE-DWELLING DID NEED A *WOMAN'S* GRACE.

NOW, WE'LL HAVE A *GODDESS OF ASGARD* TO WARM IT.

LORD ODIN--!

I-- AM *HELPLESS*, LASS-- CHAINED BY *MINE OWN VOW!*

LOKI! CEASE THY LAUGHTER-- AND BEGIN THY PROMISED *PLOTTING!*

HAH! SHE *IS* LOVELY, IS SHE NOT, BROTHER FASOLT?

YET, 'TIS NOT FOR WHAT SHE *IS* THAT WE WANT HER, EH?

EEEEEE

'TIS WHY... *I* WANT HER, FAFNIR. PLEASE... HARM HER *NOT!*

NOW, IDUNN'S CRY CARRIES TO ASGARD ITSELF...

...WHERE IT GOES NOT UNHEEDED.

HARK THEE, THUNDER GOD! *IDUNN* CALLS!

AYE--AND WITH SUCH STARK *FEAR* IN HER VOICE-- THAT I WOULD GO TO HER WERE SHE PILLORIED IN *HEL* ITSELF!

HOLD FAST, FREY! WE GO TO THY GOLD-TRESSED SISTER!

FASOLT-- AND FAFNIR, MOST BASE STORM-GIANT OF ALL!

RELEASE IDUNN-- OR PAY A PRICE BEYOND MEASURE!

BY HEIMDALL'S HORN! 'TIS I, IN MINE OWN MIND'S EYE-- YET I DO REMEMBER NAUGHT OF THIS!

OF COURSE NOT... ELSE EYE WOULD NOT HAVE TO SHOW IT TO YOU.

WATCH ON!

YOU'VE NO QUARREL WITH US, GOD OF THUNDER.

AYE! THOUGH YOU AND WE HAVE FOUGHT ERE NOW, WE WANT THIS DAY ONLY WHAT WE'VE EARNED... WHAT WE WERE PROMISED...

...THE GODDESS IDUNN...

...SHE OF THE GOLDEN APPLES AND THE FAIR HA--

ARRRRHH!

OHHH--!

THRAKK!

--THOUGH HARD-PRESSED THOU OR ANY OTHER WOULD BE TO KEEP IT.

THOR-- THEY MEANT TO CARRY ME BACK WITH THEM-- TO JOTUN-HEIM!

I'LL PROMISE THEE MORE THAN A CLOAKFULL OF ENCHANTED APPLES, VILE FAFNIR.

I'LL VOUCHSAFE THEE MINE HAMMER MJOLNIR--

AND STILL WE SHALL-- WHEN WE'VE DONE WITH THIS STORM-TOSSING, WHELP!

WE WANT ONLY OUR SWORN PAY-- NOTHING MORE!

SLOMM!

I HAVE GIVEN *MANY* GIANTS THEIR PAY-- *THUS!*

COME, FAFNIR! DO NOT FALL AWAY SO QUICKLY-- BUT STAND, AND COLLECT THY *FULL* DUE!

THA-

KOOM!!

MY SON! I DO SAY THEE-- NAY!

WHAT? DOTH MINE OWN *SIRE* COMMAND ME-- TO *HALT?*

THINE *EARS* WERE E'ER THE BETTERS OF THY *BRAIN,* DEAR STEP-BROTHER.

'TWAS INDEED *LORD ODIN* HIMSELF DID BID THEE STAY THY RASH HAND.

BUT NEITHER GOD NOR GODLING SHALL FORCE ME TO STAY MINE *OWN!*

COME, FAFNIR! E'EN THOR BE NO MATCH FOR US *TWAIN.*

THAT, FASOLT, WE SHALL KNOW ERE ANOTHER *HEARTBEAT* MAY BE HEARD!

A FINAL TIME, THOR-- AND FREY-- *SHEATHE* THY WEAPONS--

--OR, BY YMIR'S BEARD, MINE ALL-POWERFUL *SPEAR* SHALL STRIKE THEE DOWN!!

ODIN HATH SPOKEN!

*IS **THIS** THE DREAD BATTLE OF **ALL-FATHER AGAINST SON** WHICH MUST END IN **DEATH** FOR THE GOD OF THUNDER?*

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THE MIGHTY

THOR™

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BEGINNING-- THE QUEST FOR THE RING OF POWER!

pollard

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THE PRICE AND THE PRIDE!

IN HIS OWN MIND'S EYE, THROUGH THE POWER OF THE ENTITY WHICH WAS THE **EYE OF ODIN**, THOR BEHOLDS -- **HIMSELF.**

HIMSELF, BEFORE THE NEWLY-BUILT WALLS OF **VALHALLA**, FENDING OFF A HARD-DEALT BLOW FROM A TOWERING **STORM-GIANT...**

BEWARE, FASOLT!

SKRAA

THEN I'LL STRIKE YOU AGAIN-- AND YET *AGAIN*-- TILL YOU ARE *FORE'ER FALLEN!*

THY PUNY SMITINGS DO BUT SERVE TO *ROUSE* MY WRATH, NOT TO QUENCH IT!

LF79

SLAY HIM, FASOLT!

FFFOOOMFF!

THOR!

I'D HAVE DONE THE DEED MYSELF, BUT THE BLOND GNOME FELLED ME ERE I WAS *PREPARED.*

THY *LIES* BE AS GREAT AS THY *GIRTH,* STORM-GIANT.

I'LL DEAL WITH *BOTH*-- WHEN I HAVE DISPOSED OF THINE O'ERBOLD BROTHER.

YOU'LL DEAL WITH ME *NOW,* IMP OF ASGARD!

PERHAPS YOU COULD FELL THAT WEAKLING *FASOLT*-- BUT I AM *FAFNIR,* MIGHTIEST STORM-GIANT OF ALL THE BROOD.

FAFNIR, DO YOU HEAR?

KLAM!

BLAM!

AYE, DOLT-- I DO HEAR, INDEED...

...E'EN AS EARLIER I DID HEAR THE CRIES OF THE GODDESS *IDUNN,* WHOM YE TWO WOULD HAVE CARRIED OFF TO YOUR VILE ABODE.*

WHEN I BE FINISHED WITH THEE, THOU WILT BE GLAD MERELY TO LIMP THERE BY *THYSELF!*

AH, MILORD ODIN... THIS BE *MERRIMENT* MOST GRAND THY SCHEMINGS HAVE UNLEASHED UPON US, DOST THOU NOT AGREE?

*LAST ISSUE. --ROY.

I'LL DEAL WITH *THEE* ANON, MINE HALF-BROTHER LOKI... FOR WHAT PART THOU HAST DOUBTLESS PLAYED IN THESE GIANTS' BOLD EFFRONTERY.

RAPP!

FOR NOW, SEE IN THIS *FIST-BLOW* THE MEREST SHADOW CAST BEFORE IT, BY THINE OWN COMING FATE!

WHAT? DOES BRAVE, BATTERED *FASOLT* STAGGER TO HIS FEET AGAIN?

'TIS *BADLY* INDEED THOU MUST HAVE WANTED FAIR *IDUNN*, SHE OF THE GOLDEN APPLES, FOR THY *BOND-SLAVE!*

YET, BE OF *GOOD CHEER*, YE BOTH!

IDUNN DWELLETH E'ER IN *ASGARD*, BUT YE SHALL HAVE AT LEAST--

--EACH OTHER!

SLAM!!

A *FINAL TIME* DO I COMMAND THEE, THOR-- *STAY THINE HAND!*

ELSE, THOU WILT FIND THAT OF *ODIN* HIMSELF RAISED AGAINST THEE!

--AND ONLY *THEN*, THUNDER GOD, DID YOU *CEASE* YOUR PUMMELLING OF THE EMBATTLED STORM-GIANTS.

EYE OF ODIN-- TRULY, THIS BE *MADNESS* BEYOND ALL MEASURE!

IF ALL THIS HAPPENED IN THE DIM DAWN OF THE GODS' OWN CREATION--

--WHY DO I REMEMBER *NAUGHT* OF IT?

BECAUSE LORD ODIN WILLED IT SO! WATCH ON...

...AS YOUR *FORMER SELF* ALSO ASKS:

WHY, FATHER? WHY DO YOU SHIELD YON FIENDS FROM MY RIGHTFUL *WRATH*?

THAT WRATH BE *NOT* SO RIGHTFUL AS THOU DOST IMAGINE, ALAS.

WHAT?--

--WHEN THEY WOULD HAVE DRAGGED FRAIL *IDUNN* OFF TO THEIR HELLISH ABODES?

THY WORDS DO THEE CREDIT, MY SON-- AND YET--

WHY DON'T YOU *TELL* HIM, LORD OF ASGARD-- TELL YOUR OVER-ZEALOUS OFF-SPRING THE *TRUTH!*

AYE-- THAT IT WAS YOUR OWN *GREED* AND *FOLLY* WHICH COST YOUR KIND THE GOLD-HAIRED GODDESS NOW CRADLED IN YOUR WIFE'S ARMS.

TELL HIM HOW YOU *PROMISED* HER TO US, IF WE RAISED THE *WALLS OF VALHALLA* IN A SHORT SPAN OF TIME!

YOU THOUGHT WE'D NOT DO IT, BUT WE *DID*-- AND NOW WE DEMAND OUR LOVELY *WAGE!*

GIVE HER TO US!

FATHER-- TELL ME THAT YON MOUNTAINOUS VILLAINS DO *LIE!*

SWEAR TO ME THAT THEY DO BASELY LIE!

BUT ODIN'S SILENCE SPEAKS UNTOLD WORLDS.

NOW, HE TURNS TO SNEERING *LOKI*...

THOU--MINE *ADOPTED SON*, THOUGH HALF GIANT BY BIRTH...

THOU DIDST SWEAR TO FIND ME *RELEASE* FROM MY BARGAIN.

NAY, SIRE... I SWORE ONLY TO *TRY*...

AND INDEED, MINE EARTHLY SEARCH FOR A *RANSOM* YON STORM-GIANTS MIGHT ACCEPT IN PLACE OF BEAUTEOUS IDUNN TOOK ME TO THE RIVER-ABODE OF THE FAIR *RHINE-MAIDENS*.

THE *RHINEGOLD HORDE* HAD BEEN SUCH A TREASURE, THEY AVOWED...

BUT, 'TWAS *STOLEN* FROM THEM BY VILE *ALBERICH*, HIM OF THE HATED *NIBELUNG* CLAN.*

*LAST ISSUE. --ROY.

THEY PRAY DAILY THAT THOU, ALL-FATHER, *AVENGE* THEIR LOSS, AND RETURN THE GOLD TO THEM.

I PROMISED TO SPEAK OF THIS TO THEE...AND I HAVE KEPT MY WORD.

THOU ART EITHER *FOOL* OR *DE-CEIVER*, TO ASK HELP OF ONE WHO HATH FOES ENOUGH TO TROUBLE A *COSMOS!*

ARE WE *GNATS*, SIRE, TO ASK HELP OF THIS *TRICKSTER GOD?*

I SAY-- LET *MJOLNIR* LAY THESE STORM-GIANTS LOW--

--AND BOTH *ASGARD* AND *VALHALLA* SHALL BREATHE THE EASIER FOR IT!

THOU KNOWEST FULL WELL THAT *CANNOT BE*, MY SON.

I BE *BOUND* BY MINE OATH TO THEM, SWORN UPON MY SACRED SPEAR-- AND YE OTHER GODS BE BOUND, IN TURN, BY *MY* VOW.

ENOUGH OF THIS TALK, LORD ODIN!

AYE! GIVE US LOVELY *IDUNN*, AND WE'LL BE OFF TO *JOTUNHEIM*.

REJOICE, LORD ODIN, THAT THE GIANTS WILL SETTLE FOR IDUNN ALONE!

WHAT MEAN'ST THOU?

THE RHINEGOLD WAS BUT A PRETTY TOY, BEFORE...

BUT NOW, FASHIONED INTO A RING BY ALBERICH, 'TWILL GIVE ITS LOATHESOME OWNER SUPREME POWER O'ER EARTH AND THE GODS ALIKE!

'TWAS A SIMPLE THING FOR HIM TO MAKE...ONCE HE HAD RENOUNCED ALL LOVE!

BY YMIR'S BREATH--I MUST HAVE THAT RING OF POWER!

FATHER--NO!

TRUE, WE SHOULD PERHAPS WREST THAT RING FROM THE ONE CALLED ALBERICH--LEST WE ALL BECOME HIS SLAVES, ONE DAY SOON.

BUT, TIME ENOW FOR THAT--WHEN WE HAVE FREED IDUNN FROM YON GIANTS!

LORD ODIN--HEAR NOW OUR WORDS!

EH? WHAT SAY YOU, FAFNIR AND FASOLT?

YOUR PLIGHT HAS MOVED US--AND WE'LL ACCEPT A LESSER GIFT THAN IDUNN.

AYE! WE'LL ACCEPT INSTEAD--THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG!

BE YE MAD, BOTH?

THOU MUST SAVE IDUNN, MILORD!

HOW CAN I GIVE YON GIANTS, WIFE, WHAT I MYSELF HAVE NOT?

IF THEY WANT THE RING, LET THEM GO AFTER IT THEMSELVES!

ALAS, CUNNING IS CALLED FOR HERE--NOT MIGHT ALONE, WHICH IS ALL WE POSSESS.

STILL, HAVE IT YOUR OWN WAY! FASOLT?...

YES, FAFNIR...

COME, GIRL! YOU'RE IN OUR POWER NOW!

IDUNN--!

NO!

KEEP BACK, FREY! ODIN HATH DECREED IT!

AND SHE'LL WARM OUR HEARTH FOREVER-- UNLESS THE *NIBELUNG RING* TAKES HER PLACE!

I HOPE THEY *DON'T* GET IT! IT'S *IDUNN*'S FAIR FACE I'D RATHER LOOK AT.

ALL-FATHER, CAN YOU NOT--?

I...CANNOT, FREY.

THEN LET *BLOOD-SON* DARE WHAT *FATHER* HATH NOT HEART FOR!!

BY THE ELDER GODS, THOU GOLD-HAIRED WHELP--

MUST I RAISE *GUNGNIR* ITSELF TO PREVENT THEE?

HEIMDALL'S HORN!

THE GIANTS ARE *GONE*--AS IS THE GODS' OWN *HONOR.*

THEY'RE NOT *ALL* THAT'S FLED.

EH? WHAT SAYEST THOU?

ODIN KNOWS WHEREOF I SPEAK...EH, MILORD?

AYE, CURSE THEE...

IDUNN E'ER HATH TENDED THE *GOLDEN APPLES OF YOUTH**-- WITHOUT WHICH WE'LL SOON SEE THAT E'EN GODS MAY GROW *OLD*-- AND *PERISH!*

*SEE ISSUE*114. --R.

SIRE... WHAT CAN WE *DO?*

ONE THING, AND ONE THING *ONLY!*

WE MUST INVADE THE *DOMAIN OF THE NIBELUNGS*--

--THAT WE MAY CAPTURE *ALBERICH'S RING,* TO TRADE FOR POOR IDUNN!

WELL SAID, SIRE!

ABIDE YE OTHERS *HERE!*

LET ONLY *THOR* AND *LOKI* COME WITH ME--

--THE ONE, FOR HIS DEVIOUS *MIND*-- THE OTHER, FOR HIS GOOD RIGHT *ARM!*

WHILE, IN THE NIGHT-DARK SUB-TERRANEAN REGIONS OF **NIBELHEIM**, LAND OF THOSE WHOM MEN CALL **GNOMES**, AND THE GODS **NIBELUNGS**...

P-PLEASE, GREAT ALBERICH-- HAVE I NOT DONE ALL THAT YOU DEMANDED OF ME?

MUST YOU NOW **EN-SLAVE** YOUR BROTHER GNOMES, AS WELL?

POWER HAS **NO** KITH OR KIN, POOR SHIVERING **MIME**... THANKS IN PART TO YOUR CLEVER **SMITHWORK!**

AND SOON, THE MEN OF **MIDGARD*** WILL BREAK THEIR BACKS FOR ME AS READILY AS THE REST OF YOU.

*MIDGARD = EARTH. --ROY.

AT THAT MOMENT, NOT FAR DISTANT, A SECTION OF CAVERN CEILING **QUIVERS** A MOMENT--

--THEN **SHATTERS!**

'TWOULD SEEM THERE BE **SOME** VIRTUE IN THEE YET, LOKI-- E'EN IF IT BE ONLY **FEAR** OF MINE HAMMER.

KRAK!

THOU HAST INDEED LED US TO **NIBELHEIM.**

SOFTER, THUNDER GOD-- IF THOU WOULDST COME UPON THE GNOMELINGS **UNAWARES!**

BEHOLD--!

HOW I ENJOY **PLAYING** WITH MY NEW TOYS!

AGAIN I RECITE THE **SPELL**--

"NIGHT AND DARKNESS, **HIDE** FROM ME NOW!"

PLEASE-- I ALREADY **KNOW** WHAT--

OWWWW! MASTER-- IT'S NOT FAIR!

YOU SMITE ME-- WHEN I CANNOT **SEE** YOU!

FOOL! **NO ONE** CAN SEE ME WHEN I DON THE GOLDEN **TARN-HELM!**

BUT, I'LL REMOVE IT-- THUS.

AND EVEN ITS POWER IS DWARFED BY THAT OF THIS GREAT GLOWING **RING**, WHICH--

HOLD! WHO'S THERE??

COME OUT OF THE **SHADOWS!**

ONLY THREE *WANDERERS*, GREAT ALBERICH-- WHO HAVE HEARD OF THY GROWING *POWER* AND *WEALTH*--AND ARE COME TO DO THEE HOMAGE.

COME IN *ENVY*, RATHER... *LOKI!*

OH YES, I *KNOW* YOU THREE-- BUT NOT *THOR*, NOR EVEN *ODIN* HIMSELF, MAY OVERCOME ME--

--WHILE I HOLD THIS GLEAMING *CIRCLET OF POWER!*

MOCK US, WILT THOU, NIBELUNG? BY VALHALLA, I'LL--

PATIENCE, MY SON.

WE ARE COME TO *LEARN*, NOT TO TEACH.

LEARN, ALL-FATHER? WHAT CAN THE IMMORTALS OF ASGARD LEARN FROM SNIVELING *GNOMES?*

HOW TO *MINE* GOLD!?

YON *HOARD* IS BUT THE WEALTH OF A *DAY'S WORK* TO ME, DULLARD...

I'LL NOT EVEN NEED THE *RING* TO TEACH YOU, WHEN I CAN DON MY *TARNHELM*--

--SAY THE WORDS, "*GIANT REPTILE, WITH COILS TO CRUSH!*"--

--AND HAVE FAR MORE THAN *INVISIBILITY* TO FIGHT WITH!

ALL-FATHER! HE'S TURNED INTO A MONSTROUS *THING*--

--AND HE *SPRINGS*, JAWS AGAPE-- FOR *ME!*

THOR--!

'TWOULD SERVE HIM *JUSTLY* TO BE DEVOURED, SIRE--

YET, IF IT BE *THY WILL* THAT THE TRICKSTER BE SPARED, THIS SUNLESS DAY--

RARRR

--THEN SO BE IT!

YOU'VE A REPUTATION FOR ACTING *RASHLY*, GOLDMANE...

THLAMM!

UNNNH--!

LET US SEE IF EITHER YOU OR YOUR REPUTATION SHALL BE-- *LONG-LIVED!*

THY COILS MIGHT WELL CRUSH *LOKI*, CHURLISH ONE--

--OR E'EN SOME *LESSER GODLING* UP ABOVE--

--BUT NOT THE *GOD OF THUNDER!*

NOT THE *LORD OF THE LIVING LIGHTNING!*

NOT *THOR!*

YOU ARE STRONG, THOR-- BUT SLAYING YOU WAS *NOT IMPORTANT* TO ME.

I MERELY WISHED TO SHOW YOU THAT YOU CANNOT OVERCOME ME-- NOT WHILE I WEAR THE *TARNHELM!*

THINK'ST *NOT*, GNOME? THEN WATCH, WHILST I--

NAY, THUNDERER-- THOU WOULDST LAY *ALL NIBELHEIM* A-WASTE, AND STILL BE FIGHTING FOR AN *ETERNITY.*

AND ETERNITY IS JUST WHAT WE DO NOT *HAVE*, JUST NOW.

YOU ARE *DOOMED*, YE GODS -- IF NOT TODAY, THEN TOMORROW, OR AN EON FROM NOW!

SOON OR LATE, I'LL BRING THE *TWILIGHT OF THE GODS* TO YOUR VERY PORTALS!

I'VE NO DOUBT OF IT NOW, ALBERICH... NO DOUBT AT ALL.

YET, IF THOU CANST GROW LARGE-- CANST THOU ALSO GROW *SMALL*?

OR IS THAT QUITE *BEYOND* THY POWERS?

IT'S NOT MY WAY NOW TO *HIDE* FROM MY FOES, GOD OF MISCHIEF, BUT I NEED MERELY SAY--

"CREEPING *TOAD*, MOTTLED AND SMALL--"

--AND IT WOULD TAKE A KEENER EYE THAN *YOURS* TO SPY ME CRAWLING AMONG THE GRAY ROCKS, EH?

'TWOULD *INDEED*, GNOME--

--IF THOU COULDST *REACH* THEM!

AND NOW, THOU SHALT *PERISH*-- UNLESS WE HAVE A *RANSOM!*

Y-YOU *TRICKED* ME!

VERY WELL, ASGARDIAN-- THE *TARNHELM* IS YOURS.

NOW, YOU MUST LET ME GO *FREE!*

HARDLY! THE TARNHELM BOUGHT THY *LIFE*, MERELY--

--THY *FREEDOM* IS YET TO BE *BARGAINED* FOR!

BRING HIM ALONG, MY SON.

GLADLY, SIRE.

THE FREED GNOMES REJOICE AT THEIR FORMER MASTER'S FORCED DEPARTURE.

AND, IN LESS THAN THE SPACE OF A WINKING EYE, ALBERICH IS TAKEN, **BOUND**, TO THE TOP OF MIDGARD'S HIGH-EST MOUNTAIN...!

AH, GOOD ALBERICH... HERE WE CAN BARGAIN IN *PEACE*, CAN WE NOT?

WHAT DO YOU *WANT* FOR MY RANSOM?

ALL THAT *GOLDEN HOARD* YOU GATHERED BELOW!

I... *AGREE*. BUT YOU MUST LOOSEN MY HANDS.

AND WHY *NOT*-- FOR, THINE OATH BE FULL AS *BINDING* ON THEE AS EVER MINE ON ME!

RELEASE HIM, LOKI.

YOU ARE... *GRACIOUS*, MILORD ODIN.

THEN, HIS EYES STAINED WITH TEARS, THE EVIL NIBELUNG KISSES HIS GLEAMING *CIRCLET*-- YET HE'S NOT SO DESPAIRING AS HE *PRETENDS*, YOU KNOW.

FOR, SO LONG AS HE RETAINS THAT SINGLE *RING*-- HE CAN *REPLENISH* HIS LOSS IN A SINGLE DAY!

THUS, NEXT MOMENT-- WITH A BLINDING BURST OF LIGHT--

LOOK THEE, FATHER! 'TIS SURELY GOLD ENOW TO SLAKE E'EN THE GREEDY THIRST OF THE *STORM-GIANTS!*

AYE... *ALMOST!*

THOU HAST GIVEN UP THY *GOLD*-- AYE, AND E'EN THE PUISSANT *TARNHELM*--

BUT, I'LL STILL HAVE-- THE *RING!*

I MIGHT HAVE *KNOWN*-- YOU'D NOT OVERLOOK IT!

I *GIVE IT UP*, THEN, HAVING NO CHOICE...

YET WITH IT RECEIVE YOU THIS *NIBELUNG CURSE:*

NO MAN OR GOD SHALL *REJOICE* IN POSSESSING THIS RING--

--THOUGH *ALL* IN HEAVEN OR EARTH SHALL *LUST* FOR IT!

THIS CURSE SHALL STAND, TILL IT BE BACK IN *ALBERICH'S* RIGHTFUL HAND!

THE RIGHTFUL HAND OF A *ROBBER OF MERMAIDS!*

THOU HAST HAD THY SAY; NOW GIVE OVER THE *RING!*

GIVE IT OVER, I SAY!

NOW *GO*-- AND BE SEEN *NO MORE* WHERE ODIN HOLDS SWAY!

I DEPART, LORD OF ASGARD-- BUT YOU'LL *REMEMBER* MY WORDS ONE DAY--

--AND CURSE *YOURSELF*, FOR YOUR IMPUDENT FOLLY!

THE PRATTLINGS OF A *FOOL*, ALL-FATHER.

MAYHAP, SIRE, THE RING SHOULD BE *DESTROYED*-- LEST THE NIBELUNG'S CURSE BE *FULFILLED!*

I FEAR *NO* GNOMELING'S IRE, MY SON.

NOW, LET US RETURN IN HASTE TO THE *REALM ETERNAL*--

--WITH *HOARD* AND GLEAMING *TARNHELM* FOR THE MONSTROUS BRETHREN OF JOTUNHEIM!

ANOTHER HEARTBEAT, AND--

LOOK THEE, FREY! ODIN AND THE OTHERS--!

AND WITH A TREASURE IT DOTH *HURT THE EYE* TO BEHOLD!

WE *OURSELVES* RETURNED, LORD ODIN, BECAUSE WE *SENSED* YOUR TRIUMPH... AND THUS *OURS*.

ODIN BE THE *POWER* AS WELL AS THE *PRIDE*, FAFNIR.

FORGET NOT THAT, OR 'TWILL BE THY *SORROW!*

HERE LIES THE NIBELUNGS' *GOLDEN HOARD*-- NOR WOULD I KEEP E'EN THE *TARNHELM* FROM YE.

TAKE IT, AND *BEGONE* FROM MY SIGHT, TILL WE DO MEET AGAIN ON THE *DAY OF RAGNAROK*--

--AND I CAN GLADLY RAISE MY *SPEAR* 'GAINST YE BOTH!

FAFNIR-- THE PILE IS *ALMOST* AS TALL AS IDUNN HERSELF, BUT--

DON'T HOLD *BACK*, ASGARDIAN!

GIVE US THAT *FINAL* BAUBLE--

--YON *RING* FORGED BY *MIME*, GREATEST OF SMITHIES!

THE... RING...?

NAY! ASK WHAT THOU WILT-- BUT *ALL THE WORLD* CANNOT MAKE ME GIVE UP THIS RING!

SIRE-- THY VOICE BE SO *STRANGE*--

--AS IF 'TIS *THEE* WHO ART POSSESSED, AND NOT THE *RING!*

WHILE WE'VE NOT THE RING, OUR *FORMER BARGAIN* STANDS.

WE'LL *KEEP* FAIR IDUNN, TILL THE RAINBOW BRIDGE BE FALLEN AND FADED!

ALL-FATHER-- I DO *BEG* OF THEE--

I *DESIRE* THY RETURN, GODDESS-- FOR *ALL* OUR SAKES, ANY YET--

THEN, WITHOUT WARNING, AN *EERIE FIGURE* APPEARS, AS IF FROM DEEP WITHIN THE EARTH ITSELF...

YIELD UP THE RING, LORD ODIN!

ONLY *DESPAIR* AND DREAD *DESTRUCTION* E'ER SHALL MARK ITS OWNER'S END!

'TIS *ERDA**-- IMMORTAL SISTER TO *VOLLA, THE PROPHET-ESS!*

AYE, BUT WHAT VOLLA KNOWS BY LOOKING *OUTWARD*, I DO PERCEIVE WITH MINE *INNER EYE.*

*ERDA IS A PRIMEVAL EARTH-GODDESS, AND A SYMBOL OF *FATE* ITSELF. --ROY.

AND I SAY-- *GIVE UP* THE RING, ODIN--

--OR A *MOURN-FUL DAY* SHALL DAWN FOR VALHALLA, LONG BEFORE ITS *TIME!*

THE ALL-FATHER IMPORTUNES HER TO *STAY.* BUT--

I HAVE WARNED THEE WELL-- AND NOW MUST *GO.*

THIS RING STILL *TEMPTS* ME SORE...

ALL THE MORE REASON, MAYHAP, TO *DISCARD* IT!

GIANTS-- HERE BE THINE ACCURSED RING, AND MAY ITS *CURSE* FOLLOW THEE HOME!

YOU... ARE *FREE*, GOLDEN ONE...

...THOUGH I'LL *MISS* YOU, WHEN ICY WINDS SLICE THROUGH JOTUNHEIM.

OH, THOR-- 'TWAS A PLACE MOST *TERRIBLE--!*

REST EASY NOW, FAIR IDUNN.

THE DANGER BE *ENDED.*

HAH! BY MAGIC OR DESIGN, THE RING OF POWER PRECISELY FITS MY FINGER!

EH? AND WHAT OF *ME?*

WE'LL *SPLIT* THE REST OF THE HOARD-- THOUGH I SHALL HAVE THE GREATER PORTION-- AND THE *TARNHELM*, AS WELL.

NOT WHILE *FASOLT* LIVES!

THEN LIVE *NO LONGER*, WHIMPERER!

THE *RING*, AT LEAST!

I'LL HAVE THE RING--

--OR ELSE I'LL-- *UNNNH!*

FOOL! YOU WERE NEVER MY EQUAL IN STRENGTH, THE BEST DAY YOU DID BREATHE--

--AND IN *DEATH*, YOU ARE ONLY EQUAL TO THE *WORMS!*

ALL-FATHER--!

YYAAAAAA

LET IT *BE*, MY SON! THEIR BUTCHERY BE NO CONCERN OF OURS.

LOOK RATHER TO YOUR *OWN* SAFETY, YE GODS OF ASGARD--

THEN I SHALL *MAKE* IT MINE-- MINE, AND *MJOLNIR'S!*

FOR, ONE DAY FAFNIR SHALL KNOW THE *FULL SECRET* OF MIME'S GOLDEN RING--

AND ON THAT DAY, YOU'LL LEARN THAT EVEN *IM-MORTALS* MAY PERISH-- AT *RAGNAROK!*

THOU DOST DARE TO POSTURE THUS WITH A *PURLOINED TALISMAN!?*

BY ODIN, I SHALL-- *WHAT??*

THE STORM-GIANT DOTH *VANISH* BE-FORE MINE EYES-- NOT *INVISIBLE* MERELY, AS ALBERICH WAS--

-- BUT TRULY *NO LONGER HERE!*

REJOICE, THUNDER GOD! FOR, WHEN NEXT YOU DO SEE ME, YOU MAY WELL WISH YOU DID *NOT!*

THEN, WHEN FAFNIR HAS QUITE DISAPPEARED...

WHAT *FEARFUL FORCE* RESIDES IN THE CURSE OF ALBERICH!

FORTUNATE FOR US THAT ONE OF THE GIANT'S DULLNESS DOUBTLESS *NE'ER* WILL FATHOM THE RING'S FULL POWER.

SO WE MUST HOPE AND *PRAY*...

BUT AT LEAST FAIR *IDUNN'S* FREE, AND WE NO LONGER CRINGE UNDER THE SHADOW OF *OLD AGE*, AS WELL.

FREY, BELOVED BROTHER...!

AYE.

THOU HAST *OTHER* PROBLEMS, SIRE... FOR, THERE BE NO *PATHWAY* 'TWIXT ASGARD AND THY NEWLY-BUILT *VALHALLA*, FOR WHICH THOU NEARLY DID PAY SO DEAR.

TRUE. MY SON...?

'TWILL BE MY *PLEASURE*, FATHER.

FOR FULL MANY A YEAR HATH MULTI-HUED *BIFROST* SPANNED THE COSMIC VOID 'TWIXT ASGARD AND *MIDGARD*--

--E'EN THOUGH WE GODS BUT RARELY DO TREAD UPON THE LATTER.

YET NOW, LET THE RAINBOW BRIDGE GAIN *NEW* BANDS OF COLOR-- BANDS HEWN BY MINE ENCHANTED *URU HAMMER*--

--THAT *VALHALLA* MAY BE JOINED, FOR ALL TIME, TO THE *GLEAMING REALM!*

'TIS *DONE!* AND NOW, *RETURN* TO ME, MIGHTY MJOLNIR--

FOR, NO ARM SAVE *THOR'S* E'ER MAY WIELD THINE IRRESISTIBLE, RELENTLESS *POWER!*

MY *THANKS*, BLOODSON...

AND NOW, WIFE FRIGGA, WILT THOU *JOIN* ME IN VALHALLA, MY *HALL OF HEROES?*

ERE LONG, THOSE HALLS SHALL RING WITH THE SHOUT OF THE *VALIANT SLAIN WARRIORS* I SHALL PLUCK, IN THE MOMENTS OF THEIR DEATHS, FROM THE BATTLEFIELDS OF *MIDGARD.*

BUT FOR NOW, *WE TWO* SHALL BE THE ONLY ONES THERE.

THEN, I'LL JOIN THEE MOST *GLADLY*, MINE HUSBAND.

'TWILL BE A WELCOME *RESPITE* FROM THIS DAY'S SAD VIOLENCE.

AYE! AND TOMORROW, I'LL WEAVE A SPELL TO *WIPE OUT* ALL MEMORY OF THESE DOINGS.

THEN, MAYHAP, 'TWILL HAVE ALL BEEN *WORTH* IT, AFTER ALL!

ODIN HATH LAID THE SEEDS, THIS DAY, OF ASGARD'S *END*--AND I'M CURSED IF I'LL PERISH WITH THE *REST* OF YE!

THOU WILT PERISH BATTLING AT OUR *SIDE*, IF PERISH WE MUST--OR ELSE, THOU SHALT PERISH BY *MINE HAND!*

THUS SPEAKS THOR!

*AYE, THUS SPOKE THOR IN THAT LONG-AGO DAY... BECAUSE YOU WERE **YOUNG**, AND HEADSTRONG, AND LESS **WISE** THAN TODAY.*

BUT NOW--I THINK I DO BEGIN TO SEE WHAT LIES *BEHIND* THIS MADNESS, EYE OF MY FATHER--

AND BY HELA, *I LIKE IT NOT!*

NEXT • ISSUE •

ARE YOU READY FOR...

THE *MORTAL* THOR?

-also-
THE RETURN OF OUR LEGEND-LADEN ***LETTERS PAGE!***

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When DR. DONALD BLAKE strikes his wooden walking-stick upon the ground, it becomes the mystic hammer MJOLNIR— and the lame physician is transformed into the Norse God of Thunder, Master of the Storm, Lord of the Living Lightning— and heir to the throne of eternal Asgard....

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ON A WORLD THAT IS NOT HIS OWN, A **THUNDER GOD** RAGES-- AND THE SPACE **BETWEEN** THE WORLDS REVERBERATES WITH THE RESOUNDING ECHO OF HIS **RIGHTEOUS WRATH--!**

Continuing-- THE SOUL-SHATTERING CELESTIALS SAGA!

HEAR ME, EYE OF ODIN!

BECAUSE I DID DEFEAT THEE IN COMBAT, THOU HAST SWORN TO TELL ME **THAT WHICH I WOULD KNOW.***

KEEP NOW THINE AVOWED WORD-- OR BY ASGARD, I SHALL MAKE THEE WISH TO GODS UNBORN THAT THOU **HADST!**

FROM VALHALLA -- A VALKYRIE!

LF95

*AS SEEN IN ISSUES #292-295. --R.T.

WELL, ORB? WILT THOU FULFILL THINE OATH, OR MUST ENCHANTED *MJOLNIR* SMITE THEE ANEW?

YOU ARE MUCH GIVEN TO **THREATS**, ODINSON, BUT **EYE** AM NOT IMPRESSED.

HAVE YOU LEARNED **NOTHING** FROM WHAT **EYE** HAVE REVEALED TO YOU SO FAR?

VERY GOOD! WHAT ELSE?

TAUNT ME ***NOT***, EYE!

I LEARNED ALSO THAT, FROM THE ***ASHES*** OF THAT ELDER ASGARD, THE ***NEW*** ONE ROSE LIKE A FIRE-BORN PHOENIX.

AYE! I HAVE SEEN THAT THERE WAS ***ANOTHER RAGNAROK***-- A TWILIGHT OF GODS NOW TWO MILLENNIA DEAD--

--IN WHICH AN ***ELDER ASGARD*** PERISHED, OF WHICH I KNEW ***NAUGHT.***

THOU DIDST SHOW ME THE AWESOME ***BIRTH OF ODIN***-- E'EN MINE ***OWN*** BIRTHING, THOUGH SHADOWED IN DARKNESS.

I DID SEE THE THEFT OF THE FABLED ***RHINEGOLD*** BY THE VILE GNOME ***ALBERICH***--

--AND HOW THE ***ALL-FATHER*** DID STEAL IT IN TURN, ONLY TO GIVE IT O'ER TO THE STORM GIANT ***FAFNIR.***

HOW ELSE COULD HE HAVE FREED THE GODDESS ***IDUNN***, WHOSE GOLDEN APPLES KEEP THE GODS YOUNG?

BUT NOW, BEHOLD **MORE** IN THY MIND'S BRIGHT EYE--!

I DO SO! BUT THIS TIME, I'D BEST LEARN WHAT I ***WILL!***

AH! ETERNAL ***ASGARD*** OPENS TO MY GAZE ONCE MORE, IN A DAY LONG GONE...!

YES. BUT NOW, THOR, LOOK **BEYOND** ASGARD-- AND SEE THAT YOUR FATHER ODIN STANDS TODAY NOT THERE, BUT IN ANOTHER PLACE OF NIGH-EQUAL SPLENDOR:

VALHALLA, THAT MASSIVE EDIFICE WHICH THE STORM-GIANTS FAFNIR AND FASOLT DID CONSTRUCT FOR HIM!

AND HEAR HIM **MUSE** TO HIMSELF IN THESE EARLIER DAYS, WHEN **HE**, NOT THE GODDESS **HELA** PRESIDED OVER THAT PLACE WHOSE NAME MEANS ***HALL OF HEROES***...

BY THE SACRED SPEAR! 'TWOULD SEEM I NOW HAVE ***ALL*** THAT EITHER MAN OR BATTLE-GOD COULD DESIRE.

AND YET, MY GLORY BE NOT COMPLETE-- INDEED, THEY RING ***HOLLOW*** ALL ABOUT ME.

COULD IT BE BECAUSE OF THE ***CURSE OF ALBERICH***, WHICH THE LOATHESOME GNOME DID LAY UPON ME?

AYE, 'TIS MOST SURELY THE REASON.

YET, WHAT *CHOICE* HAD I-- FOR ELSE, MINE ASGARDIAN HOSTS WOULD HAVE *PERISHED,* FOR LACK OF IDUNN'S FRUIT?

WELL, TIME ENOW *LATER* TO WORRY ABOUT ALBERICH'S CURSE...

FOR NOW, I MUST SPY ON DISTANT *MIDGARD.**

*MIDGARD = EARTH, *ROY.*

AH, THERE BE A ***BATTLE MOST FIERCE*** IN PROGRESS THERE, ***VIKING*** AGAINST ***VIKING***-- ALL OF THEM MY WORSHIPPERS!

'TIS A SIGHT TO ***GLADDEN*** MINE HEART-- NOT BECAUSE POOR MORTALS MUST DIE THIS DAY--

"-- BUT BECAUSE NOW MY ***NINE VALKYRIES***-- THOSE WONDROUS ***SHIELD-MAIDENS*** I DID CREATE WHEN VALHALLA WAS ESTABLISHED-- MAY DESCEND WITH FEARSOME VIGOR TO THE FRAY.

DOWNWARD, MY SISTERS!

ARE WE NOT TRULY CALLED-- THE ***CHOOSERS OF THE SLAIN***?

"AFTER ALL, MORTALS WOULD DIE SOON OR LATE IN ANY EVENT-- AND THEIR LIVES ARE AS THE LIVES OF ***FLIES,*** IN THE SIGHT OF THE GODS --

"--BUT, 'TIS ***WARRIORS*** I SHALL NEED ON THE FATEFUL DAY WHEN ***RAGNAROK*** DOTH FALL 'PON THIS ASGARD AS UPON THAT OTHER--

"AND WHAT ***MIGHTIER*** WARRIORS CAN THERE BE, THAN THE MERCILESS ***VIKINGS*** I DID SELECT TO BE MY WORSHIPPERS?

"***TOO LONG*** HAVE VALHALLA'S RAMPARTS STOOD ***EMPTY OF LIFE.***

"ITS NAME DOTH MEAN '***HALL OF HEROES***'-- AND 'TIS TIME IT DID EARN ITS NAME!"

*SO SPEAKS **LORD ODIN**, AS HIS VALKYRIES GO ABOUT THEIR APPOINTED TASK.*

BUT, ***EYE*** KNOW FULL WELL THIS IS ***OLD NEWS*** TO YOU, THUNDERER.

WELL, THIS ***NEXT*** SCENE SHALL BE ***MOST*** STRANGE TO YOU-- EVEN THOUGH THE ***FACE*** AND ***FORM EYE*** SHALL SHOW YOU SHALL BE ***MOST FAMILIAR*** INDEED!

SHOW ON, THEN!

BEHOLD NOW, THUNDER GOD, A **MAN** STRIDING AMID A RAGING **STORM** SUCH AS YOU YOURSELF MIGHT HAVE WILLED, A THOUSAND YEARS AGO.

SEE HOW HE STRUGGLES AGAINST THE BITING **WIND**, WRAPPING HIS SCARLET CLOAK ABOUT HIM--

--TILL HE SEES--

A *DWELLING*, HERE AMID THE HOWLING WILDERNESS! PRAISE BE TO ALL THE *GODS IN ASGARD!*

YET, WHAT MANNER OF HOUSE IS THIS, WHERE A *GREAT TREE* SEEMS TO GROW FROM ITS VERY CENTER-- AS IF IT WERE *YGGDRASIL, THE TREE OF LIFE*, ITSELF!

STILL, THAT IS OF LITTLE CONCERN-- TO *ONE PURSUED.*

NO MATTER *WHOSE* WARM HEARTH THIS MAY BE--

--HERE I MUST *REST!*

BUT, THOUGH HIS WORDS ARE DEFIANT, HIS POWERFUL LEGS NOW GROW **FRAIL** BENEATH HIS FRAME...

:UNNNH--!:

--AND HE **SINKS**, EXHAUSTED, BARELY WITHIN THE DOORWAY.

ONCE AGAIN, EYE, THOU HAST SHOWN ME *MYSELF*-- YET IN A GARB, AYE, E'EN A *LIFE*, I DO REMEMBER *NOT!*

YOU **SHALL** REMEMBER IT, THOR.

BELIEVE ME WHEN I SAY--YOU **SHALL!**

FOR, AT THAT MOMENT, FROM AN INNER CHAMBER...

WHAT--? A *WAYFARER* WITHIN OUR HOUSE!?

W-WATER! A DRINK--!

YES-- FOR I SEE YOUR LIPS ARE PARCHED.

THE FALLEN ONE RECOVERS QUICKLY...

MY THANKS! BUT, WHO IS IT RESTORES ME LIFE?

THIS HOUSE... AND THIS WIFE... BELONG TO *HUNDING*.

LET ME TEND TO YOUR *WOUNDS*...!

THEY ARE NOTHING.

I'LL BUT REST A MOMENT, AND THEN TAKE MY LEAVE. I--

THAT *SHADOW*! WHO--?

FEAR NOT--

--IT IS *HUNDING*, MY HUSBAND!

AND WHO IS *THIS* YOU MAKE OVER LIKE A SIMPERING GIRL?

SHE DID NOTHING *WRONG*, GOOD HUNDING.

ACCEPT WELCOME AS MY *GUEST*, TRAVELER.

WOMAN, BRING US FOOD.

A *WANDERER*, MY LORD -- WHOM *NEED* AND THE *STORM* DROVE INSIDE.

YOU ARE AS FAIR AND BLOND AS MY WIFE, AND I NOTED *NO HORSE* TETHERED OUTSIDE.

WHO ARE YOU AND HOW CAME YOU HERE?

AS YOUR GRACIOUS WIFE HAS SAID: FROM THE *STORM*.

THAT'S NO ANSWER!

PERHAPS THERE'S *MORE* TO THIS THAN YOU'VE TOLD ME, EH, WIFE?

MY LORD-- YOU'RE *HURTING* ME--!

STAY YOUR HAND, HUNDING!

I THANK YOU FOR YOUR HOSPITALITY-- BUT I'LL *NOT* HAVE YOUR WIFE INNOCENTLY ACCUSED!

STAY YOUR TEMPER, STRANGER; MY WIFE IS USED TO SUCH CARESSES, AND KNOWS I MEAN HER NO HARM.

STILL, I WOULD LEARN *WHO* YOU ARE.

SURELY, A *NAME* SEEMS A FAIR EXCHANGE FOR A ROOF OVER YOUR HEAD IN THIS STORM, DOES IT NOT?

YOU MAY CALL ME..."*WOE-KING*," FOR I AM A SOVEREIGN OF SORROWS.

MY FATHER WAS *WULF*, AND I CAME ONE OF A *PAIR*...FOR A *TWIN SISTER* HAD I.

"WE LIVED IN A *DEEP WOODS*, WHERE MY FATHER RAISED ME TO THE *HUNT*.

"I KNEW NOT HIS KITH OR KIN, BUT WAS DIMLY AWARE THAT WE HAD... *ENEMIES*.

"AND ONE DAY, WE RETURNED FROM HUNTING TO FIND OUR HOUSE BURNED-- OUR LAIR LAID WASTE--

"--MY MOTHER *SLAIN*, AND MY SISTER DOUBTLESS CONSUMED BY THE RAGING *FIRE*.

"IT WAS THE CLAN CALLED THE *NEIDINGS* WHICH DID THE DEED, MY FATHER SAID...

"...AND THEY'D SOON RETURN TO SLAY *US*, AS WELL.

"THUS WE *FLED*, THOUGH WE'D BOTH HAVE PREFERRED TO STAY AND FIGHT.

"ONLY A *FOOL* LETS HIS *FOES* CHOOSE TIME AND PLACE.

"IN TIME, WE STOOD TO FACE THEM, THOSE THIEVING, MURDERING NEIDINGS--

"--AND *MANY* THE DOGS WHO FELL BEFORE THE WOLVES, THERE IN THE DARK FOREST NIGHT.

"YET, WHEN OUR FOES ALL LAY DEAD, OR ELSE HAD SCATTERED TO THE MOON-WINDS...MY FATHER HAD *VANISHED*...

"AND HIS *WOLFSKIN CLOAK* WAS ALL I EVER FOUND.

"FROM THAT DAY TO THIS, I'VE ROAMED THE WORLD, AN *OUTCAST*.

"YET, MY *SWORD* AT LEAST WAS MY FRIEND -- UNTIL OF LATE I ANSWERED A WOMAN'S *CRY FOR HELP*...

AIEEEEE

"HER LOATHSOME CLAN WERE DRAGGING HER, DESPITE HER STRUGGLES, TO A *MARRIAGE* SHE DID NOT WANT... AND MY HEART WENT OUT TO HER.

FEAR NOT, DAMSEL! YOU'LL WED *NO ONE* AGAINST YOUR WILL!

"AND SO, THIRSTING BLADE IN HAND, I WENT TO HER RESCUE.

"ONE AFTER ANOTHER OF THEM *FELL* BENEATH MY FURY--

"BUT ALAS, I'D RECKONED WITHOUT THE *BOND OF KINSHIP*...

MURDERER! YOU ARE SLAYING MY *BROTHERS!*

"I TRIED TO KEEP BOTH *MAIDEN* AND *CLANSMEN* AT BAY-- BUT A *STRAY SWORD* SWUNG--

"--AND SHE FELL AMID THEM, SLAIN BY THEIR VENGEFUL HAND.

"*MORE* KINSMEN CAME, I KNEW... SO I FLED..."

...AND NOW YOU KNOW WHY I CALL MYSELF *WOE-KING.*

ASSASSIN!

THEY WERE *MY* KIN YOU SLEW-- THOUGH I CAME TOO LATE TO JOIN THE EARLIER FRAY.

NOW I KNOW WHY THE *TRACKS* OF THE SLAYER LED TO MY *OWN HOUSE!*

WHAT--?

I'LL *KILL* YOU NOW--!

THEN I MUST--

HUNDING--*NO!* YOUR *OATH OF HOSPITALITY*--!

YOU SPEAK *TRUE,* WIFE! OATHS ARE NOT *LIGHTLY* MADE IN THE NORTHLAND.

FOR TONIGHT, YOU ARE MY *GUEST,* WULF-SON-- BUT *ARM* YOUR-SELF FOR THE MORROW!

FOR, WHEN *DAYLIGHT* COMES, WHETHER YOU HAVE SWORD OR NO--

--YOU'LL *PAY* YOUR DEBT, IN *BLOOD!*

COME, WIFE!

*AND SO, THE ONE WHO CALLS HIMSELF **WOE-KING** AWAITS, WITH HEAVY HEART, THE COMING DAWN.*

*FOR, WHAT **WEAPON** SHALL HE FIND HERE, IN THE HOUSE OF HIS **NEWFOUND FOE?***

THEN, DURING THE DEEPEST AND DARKEST PART OF THE NIGHT...

HSSST! ARE YOU AWAKE, WAYFARER?

AYE, BUT, YOUR *HUSBAND*--

--LIES IN *HEAVY SLEEP*, FOR I MINGLED A *POTION* WITH HIS DRINK.

BUT *WHY*--?

THAT I MIGHT SHOW YOU-- *THIS!*

A *SWORD* IMBEDDED IN THE TREE! I DID NOT SEE IT BEFORE, THERE IN THE SHADOWS.

A BAND OF HUNDING'S VILLAINOUS *KINSMEN* SAT IN THIS HOUSE, AT THE *WEDDING FEAST* OF A MOST UNWILLING *DAMSEL*--

--WHEN A GREY-CLAD *STRANGER* SUDDENLY APPEARED, HOLDING A GLEAMING *SWORD*--

--WHICH HE DROVE DEEP INTO THE *ASH*, ERE HE WORDLESSLY DEPARTED--

AND WHERE HE HAD DRIVEN IT--

--NO MAN COULD PULL IT *OUT* AGAIN!

YET, I SENSED IN THE STRANGER'S *LOOK* AT ME THAT *REVENGE* FOR MY SORROWS WOULD BE MINE IF THAT SWORD WERE PULLED FROM THE TREE-- FOR, *I* WAS THE MAIDEN UNWILLINGLY *WEDDED* THAT NIGHT!

THEN, YOUR REVENGE IS AT *HAND!*

MY FATHER TOLD ME I'D *FIND* A SWORD, IN MY TIME OF *GREATEST NEED*-- AND THAT TIME IS SURELY *NOW.*

LET "*NEEDFUL*" BE THE NAME OF THIS TIMELY BLADE--

--AND LET MY OWN NAME BE NO LONGER *WOE-KING*--

--BUT SIEGMUND, SON OF WULF, AND MIGHTIEST WARRIOR OF THE HOUSE OF THE VOLSUNGS!

WHAT? ARE YOU TRULY SIEGMUND WHO STANDS BESIDE ME?

KNOW THEN THAT I AM SIEGLINDA-- YOUR TWIN--

--AND THAT IT WAS FROM WULF'S BURNING HOUSE THAT THE MURDEROUS KIN OF HUNDING CARRIED ME OFF, YEARS AGO!

YOU--YOU ARE SIEGLINDA, WHO WAS BUT A CHILD WHEN SPIRITED OFF?

YES! WE ARE THEN BROTHER AND SISTER-- WHEN I DARED HOPE WE MIGHT BE EVEN MORE?

NAY, NOT TRUE BROTHER AND SISTER--

FOR, I HAVE LONG SUSPECTED THAT FATHER WULF WAS FAR MORE THAN MERELY HUMAN--

AND BEING SO SIRED, WE ARE BEYOND ALL KINSHIP-- LIKE UNTO GODLINGS OURSELVES!

SO, EYE OF ODIN-- 'TWAS ALL THEN A PLOT OF MY FATHER'S THOU HAST SHOWN ME.

SMALL WONDER! HE DOTH PLOT MUCH, IT SEEMS.

YOU KNOW NOT THE HALF OF IT, THUNDER GOD...

...THOUGH EVENTS EVEN THEN TRANSPIRING IN ASGARD MAY BEGIN TO ENLIGHTEN YOU.

BRUNNHILDA! WHERE-BE MY FAVORITE AMONGST THE WARLIKE VALKYRIES?

HERE, MILORD.

HIE THEE, THEN, TO THE BATTLE BELOW-- FOR SIEGMUND, WHO BE MINE OWN OFFSPRING, MUST PREVAIL--

--WHILE HUNDING MAY FIND HIS WAY, ON HIS OWN, TO HELA'S DARK REALM, FOR I DO BANISH HIM FROM SACRED VALHALLA.

AS EVER, I'LL RIDE TO DO THY BIDDING, LORD ODIN...

...THOUGH ANOTHER BATTLE COMES THY WAY, E'EN NOW, WHICH THOU MUST BRAVE IN THY WAY AS SIEGMUND DOTH IN HIS.

FRIGGA, BELOVED WIFE!

CALL ME NOT WIFE, BUT ONLY SLAVE!

WHAT MEAN'ST THOU?

THOU CANST ASK THAT-- WHILE SENDING *BRUNNHILDA* OUT TO SLAY VALIANT *HUNDING*?

VALIANT!?

I SEE *NO* VALOR IN HUNDING, WIFE.

AT LEAST HE DOTH KEEP HIS *MARRIAGE VOWS*-- AND HE HATH PRAYED UNTO ME FOR *REVENGE* FOR THE BREAKING OF THEM!

I AM *GODDESS* OF MARRIAGES, MILORD--

...AND I DEMAND *VENGEANCE* UPON THE WARRIOR WHO HATH TRANSGRESSED ITS VOWS.

THOUGH HE BE THINE OWN HALF-HUMAN SON-- *SIEGMUND MUST DIE!*

SUCH VENGEANCE BE TRULY THINE TO *DEMAND*, FRIGGA-- YET 'TIS NOT IN MINE HEART TO STRIKE DOWN MINE OWN *OFFSPRING*.

I ASK ONLY THAT THOU DOST SHIELD HIM NOT.

TAKE BACK THE *SWORD* THOU DIDST FASHION FOR HIM!

I SHALL DO-- AS THOU DOST ASK.

'TIS THY DUE, AS *ODIN'S QUEEN*.

I LEAVE THEE NOW, MILORD, TO DO AS THOU MUST.

DO AS THOU WILT WITH THE CHANGELING *SIEGLINDA*-- BUT THY BLOODSON *SIEGMUND* MUST PERISH THIS NIGHT!

THOU HAST HEARD, VALKYRIE.

GO NOW, AND PERFORM THE DEED.

ALL-FATHER-- DO NOT MAKE ME *DO* THIS TERRIBLE THING!

SIEGMUND IS *THY SON*, E'EN BY A HUMAN MOTHER!

NO! I WILL NOT DO IT!

THOU HAST LESS CHOICE IN THE MATTER E'EN THAN *I*, SPEAR-MAIDEN.

BECAUSE *I* AM BOUND BY OATH TO DEFEND FRIGGA'S HONOR, *THOU* ART BOUND--TO *ME*.

AYE...!

GO FORTH, THEN...

--AND *DEATH*, *DEATH* BE TO *SIEGMUND!*

SUCH, AND SUCH ALONE BE THE *VALKYRIE'S QUEST!*

THEN, LORD ODIN MURMURS ON, MORE TO HIMSELF THAN TO ANY OTHER...

'TIS *I*, AND I ALONE, WHO DID BIRTH THE COMING *TRAGEDY.*

BECAUSE OF MY FOLLY, I HAVE NOT THE *RING OF POWER* FORGED BY EVIL *ALBERICH**-- AND ONE DAY, I FEAR THE GNOMELING MAY *RECOVER* IT, AND BRING *DOOMSDAY* CRASHING DOWN AROUND THE HEADS OF THE GODS.

ON THAT DAY, WE OF ASGARD WILL *FIGHT*-- AYE, AND ALL THE *SLAIN WARRIORS IN VALHALLA.*

* SEE PREVIOUS ISSUES,--ROY.

AND WE MIGHT HAVE *WON* THE DAY, E'EN THE DAY OF *RAGNAROK*--

BUT NOW, *HELP* WHICH ODIN GAVE, ODIN MUST TAKE AWAY-- AND THUS *SIEGMUND DIES!*

YET-- *HOLD!* MINE OWN WORDS NOW DO SPUR MY THOUGHTS.

WHAT IS NEEDED HERE-- IS A HERO *NE'ER* HELPED BY MY POWER, AS SIEGMUND WAS.

SUCH A ONE MIGHT ACCOMP-LISH-- WHAT MINE *OATHS* DO BIND ME FROM DOING!

I-- DO NOT UNDERSTAND ALL THOU HAST SAID, ALL-FATHER.

NOR WERT THOU MEANT TO.

GO NOW! DO AS I HAVE COMMANDED THEE!

AS FOR ME, I SIT HERE BENEATH THE *CURSE* LAID UPON ME BY THE RING-POWERED MAGIC OF *ALBERICH*--

--AND HE WHO ALONE MAY LIFT IT FROM ME, IS *NOT YET BORN.*

AND SO, UPON A WINGED STEED, *BRUNNHILDA*, FIRST AMONG VALKYRIES, WINGS DOWN TOWARD EARTH...

...THOUGH NEVER BEFORE WITH SO HEAVY A *SPEAR* OR *HEART.*

MEANWHILE, BEHOLD *SIEGMUND* AND FAIR *SIEGLINDA* ASCENDING FROM OUT A DEEP GORGE...

SIEGMUND, BELOVED-- I AM SO *TIRED*--!

THEN WE'LL REST HERE A WHILE.

YOU SHOULD *FLEE*, DEAREST ONE-- LEAVE ME HERE FOR MY HATEFUL HUSBAND TO FIND.

THAT IS FOR THOSE IN *ASGARD* TO KNOW, NOT WE.

I HAVE *DISGRACED* US BOTH-- AND SURELY *NO GOOD THING* CAN COME OF OUR LOVE.

BUT, I'LL NOT FLEE--NOR SHALL YOU!

HERE I SHALL STAND, AND WAIT FOR *HUNDING*, *THE VILE!*

AND MY SWORD, CALLED *NEEDFUL*, SHALL TASTE HIS HEART'S BLOOD!

THEN *VENGEANCE* SHALL BE YOURS, FOR THE INDIGNITIES YOU'VE SUFFERED AT HIS ROUGH HANDS.

VENGEANCE, I SAY!

SKRAAK!

TWO MEN, THEN, WITH BUT A *SINGLE CRY* UPON THEIR LIPS-- AS EACH CRAVES *REVENGE.*

AND THAT NIGHT, AS *SIEGLINDA* SLEEPS NEARBY, SIEGMUND, HUMAN-BORN OF OF WANDERING ODIN, SEEMS TO HEAR THE BAYING *HOUNDS OF HUNDING*, FAR OFF IN THE DISTANCE, YET COMING EVER CLOSER.

BUT PERHAPS IT IS ONLY A WAKING DREAM.

THEN, WELL PAST THE WITCHING HOUR--

YOU! WHO IN THE WAR-GOD'S NAME--?

I AM ONE YOU WILL *FOLLOW* SOON, SIEGMUND.

ONLY *DOOMED SOULS* MAY SEE *BRUNN-HILDA.*

A *VALKYRIE*-- SENT TO CARRY ME OFF TO *VALHALLA!*

BUT I *DEFY* YOU-- FOR I'LL NOT LEAVE *SIEGLINDA* HERE TO HUNDING'S TENDER MERCIES.

YOU HAVE LOOKED UPON MY WITHERING GLANCE, AND HAVE NO MORE CHOICE.

YOU SHALL *DIE*-- BY *HUNDING'S HAND!*

HUNDING!? *NO!* IF I MUST BE SLAIN, LET IT BE BY A MORE *WORTHY* FOE!

THY CONQUEROR BE NOT *MINE* TO DECIDE.

BUT, WHAT OF MY *SWORD*, CALLED *NEEDFUL*?

IT WAS FORGED SO THAT I MIGHT *WIN* THIS NIGHT'S BATTLE, AND MANY ANOTHER AFTER THAT.

AND NOW YOU SAY IT WILL *NOT* HELP ME?

HE WHO *GAVE* THE BLADE ITS POWER, NOW HATH TAKEN IT *AWAY*.

HE HAS *CAST* HIS MIGHTY SPELL FROM THE SWORD.

NOW ART THOU RESIGNED TO THY FATE, SIEGMUND?

NAY! NOT WHILE SIEGLINDA SLEEPS, BETRAYED BY MY COMING DEATH!

THOU DOST CARE--SO *MUCH* FOR HER, THEN?

MORE THAN FOR MY VERY BREATH!

IF I MUST PERISH, THEN, TAKE ME *NOT* TO ACCURSED VALHALLA!

TO SERVE THE DEATH-QUEEN *HELA* WOULD PLEASE ME MORE.

PERHAPS I SHOULD BRING HER *TWO* LIVES--TO SPARE MY BELOVED THE VIOLENCE OF HUNDING.

NO! SLAY HER NOT!

THY LOVE FOR THIS WOMAN HATH *MOVED* ME--AND THIS I, BRUNNHILDA, NOW SWEAR TO THEE:

BOTH THOU AND SIEGLINDA SHALL *LIVE*-- AND THOU SHALT *SLAY HUNDING* THIS NIGHT!

BE THIS *TRUE*?

I HAVE SAID IT.

HO, WOE-KING!

HUNDING!

DO YOU STAY AND *FIGHT*, BARE HANDS AGAINST MY SPEAR?

OR MUST I *CHASE* YOU DOWN?

YOU THINK ME *WEAPONLESS*, DOG OF A MURDEROUS CLAN... BUT I TOOK THIS *SWORD* FROM THE TREE THAT GROWS IN YOUR OWN HOUSE.

SOME MEDDLE-SOME *GOD* HELPED YOU, THEN...

BUT, HE'S *NOT* STANDING AT YOUR SIDE *NOW!*

THKAP!

A MIGHTY ENOUGH TOSS, I'LL WARRANT...

YET, HERE'S A BLOW FAR *MIGHTIER!*

WRAKK!

WE'LL FIGHT IT OUT *HAND TO HAND*, THEN.

AND SOON, YOU'LL LIE *LIFELESS* AT MY FEET!

WOULD THAT *I* COULD DIE-- IN HIS STEAD!

FEAR NOT, SIEGLINDA. YOU KNOW ME FOR THE *VALKYRIE* I AM... SHIELD-MAIDEN OF ODIN...

...WHILE FRIGGA IS *FAR AWAY.*

MY POWER WILL PROTECT YOUR BELOVED FROM HURT.

BEHOLD, EVEN *NOW--!*

HAH! NOW NOTHING SHIELDS YOU FROM MY WRATH.

FRIGGA! HELP THOU THINE *AVENGER!*

AND, IN DISTANT ASGARD, HUNDING'S FEARFUL CRY IS HEARD...

BEHOLD, HUSBAND!

BTAK!!

IS *THIS* HOW THOU DOST KEEP MY WORD--UNTO THINE OWN IMMORTAL *BRIDE*?

MUST HUNDING *DIE* INGLORIOUSLY-- WHILE BREAKERS OF MARRIAGE VOWS DO *FLOURISH*?

THE CRUDE DEFENDER BE OF *NO CONCERN* TO ME, FRIGGA.

YET, I DID GIVE A COMMAND UNTO *BRUNNHILDA*, FOREMOST OF MY DIVINE VALKYRIES...

...AND SHE HATH *CAST IT ASIDE*, LIKE UNTO A GOURD DRAINED DRY OF WINE.

NO MATTER WHAT THE COST, DEEP WITHIN MINE OWN BREAST, THE *WORD OF ODIN* MUST EVER STAND *SUPREME*--

--OR ELSE THE *UNIVERSE FALLS!*

THUS, *I* MUST SADLY DO... THAT WHEREIN BRUNNHILDA HATH *FAILED* ME!

UP, VILLAIN! YOU WERE FULL OF *OATHS* A MOMENT AGO, CONCERNING THINGS YOU WOULD DO TO ME.

FULFILL THEM NOW, WITH THE *SPEAR* THAT REMAINS TO YOU--

--OR ELSE I'LL SHEATHE MY HEAVEN-FORGED SWORD IN YOUR *FLESH*--

--MORE FIRMLY THAN EVER IT WAS SHEATHED IN *WOOD!*

WITH HIS LAST, DESPERATE VESTIGE OF STRENGTH, A BEATEN HUNDING RAISES HIS SPEAR BEFORE HIM...

...EVEN AS, THOUGH SIEGMUND SEES IT NOT, *LORD ODIN* DOES THE SAME!

WHAT--?

MY SWORD! THIS BLADE ENCHANTED--WHICH ONCE DEFIED ALL OUTSIDE POWER--NOW *SHATTERS* AGAINST A MERE WOOD-HAFTED *SPEAR!?*

SURELY, THEN-- I AM *FORSAKEN!*

FORSAKEN INDEED--BY ONE YOU NEVER *KNEW.*

BY YOUR *FATHER!*

ARRRGH

SIEGMUND! HE--HE IS *DEAD!*

WHEN THE *ALL-FATHER* SPEAKS--

BUT-- *YOU* SAID--

--MY WORDS ARE BUT *LEAVES* BEFORE THE HURRICANE'S BLAST.

NOW, AS HUNDING PULLS HIS BLOODIED SPEAR FROM SIEGMUND'S UNHEAVING CHEST-- DO YOU NOT FEEL LIKEWISE THE STING OF HIS DEATH, GOD OF THUNDER?

AND HAVE YOU NOT BEHELD WHAT I HAVE SWORN TO SHOW YOU?

BRUNNHILDA, HOWEVER, WAITS NOT-- BUT TAKES WING, STILL CRADLING THE GOLD-HAIRED SIEGLINDA.

I FAILED IN KEEPING HALF MY VOW TO SIEGMUND.

BUT PERHAPS I MAY YET PROTECT HIS BELOVED-- AND IN SO DOING, SAVE ALL.

WHILE, BELOW...

UNNH

AWAY, HUNDING! GO KNEEL BEFORE FRIGGA IN DEATH!

TELL HER THAT ODIN'S SPEAR AVENGED HER SHAME!

YET, MINE OWN VENGEANCE BE NOT AT AN END...

FOR, BRUNNHILDA HATH DEFIED ME-- AYE, AND IN SO DOING, MADE IT BE MINE OWN HAND THAT SLEW MY MORTAL SON.

BEYOND ALL IMAGINING SHALL BE HER PUNISH-MENT-- WHEN I HAVE O'ERTAKEN HER!

AND THOR WATCHES ALL... IN STUNNED SILENCE.

NEXT ISSUE: **REVENGE AND REBIRTH!**

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THE MIGHTY

THOR™

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The SWORD of SIEGFRIED!

When DR. DONALD BLAKE strikes his wooden walking-stick upon the ground, it becomes the mystic hammer MJOLNIR— and the lame physician is transformed into the Norse God of Thunder, Master of the Storm, Lord of the Living Lightning— and heir to the throne of eternal Asgard....

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THE SWORD OF SIEGFRIED!

CONTINUING THE STORY OF THE MORTAL THOR!

EYE HAVE KEPT MY WORD TO YOU, HAVE EYE NOT, THUNDER GOD?

YOU HAVE SEEN THE WHY AND WHEREFORE OF YOUR OWN FATHER'S SLAYING YOU-- EVEN THOUGH IT WAS A MILLENNIUM AGO, AND YOU WERE IN A MORTAL INCARNATION.*

NOW, EYE CAN GO MY WAY IN PEACE, AND--

NAY, EYE OF ODIN!

THOU HAST SHOWN ME BUT HALF THE STORY-- VERILY, I CAN SENSE THAT THERE BE MORE TO TELL.

EYE CANNOT DENY IT-- FOR, WHEN VENGEFUL HUNDING DID SLAY YOU--

--IT WAS THE ALL-FATHER'S HAND AND SACRED SPEAR BEHIND THE BLOW!

*LAST ISSUE.--ROY.

LE 117

THUS, BECAUSE IT SUITS MY OWN PURPOSES AS WELL AS YOUR DESIRES, I SHALL TELL YOU THE **REST** OF THE STORY.

EYE COULD NOT HAVE DONE SO, OF COURSE, WHEN **EYE** WAS A PART OF ODIN HIMSELF, LO, THESE MANY CENTURIES AGO.

SUFFICE IT TO SAY THAT, ON THIS LONG-PAST NIGHT... **ODIN WEEPS...**

AND **EYE** WAS THE REDDENED ORB FROM WHICH DID FLOW THE FREE-EST **TEARS!**

YET, WHEN THE WEEPING IS DONE, YOUR SIRE'S **RAGE** IS NOT.

AS HE STREAKS HOMEWARD, HE CRIES ALOUD THE **VOW OF VENGEANCE** HE HAS ALREADY SWORN:

BRUNNHILDA HATH DEFIED ME-- AYE, AND IN SO DOING, HATH MADE IT ***MINE OWN HAND*** THAT DID SLAY MY MORTAL SON.

VERILY, ***BEYOND ALL IMAGINING*** SHALL BE HER PUNISH-MENT--

--WHEN I HAVE ***O'ERTAKEN*** HER!

WHICH, OF COURSE, IS NOT DIFFICULT TO DO...

...SINCE THAT **UNHAPPY VALKYRIE** HAS INDEED, AS ODIN SUSPECTS, GONE STRAIGHT-AWAY TO A CERTAIN CORNER OF **VALHALLA:**

MY SISTERS-- ***HELP ME!***

WHAT? ***WHO*** IN EARTH OR HEAVEN CAN HELP ***BRUNNHILDA***, MIGHTIEST OF US NINE?

LEAVE OFF THY LAUGHING, VALTRAUTA!

LOOK THEE! SHE COMETH NOT ***ALONE.***

BY ODIN'S FAR-GATHERING RAVENS! BRUNNHILDA HATH BROUGHT A *MORTAL WENCH* INTO OUR MIDST!

SISTERS, THIS BE *SIEGLINDA*, BRIDE OF THE HERO *SIEGMUND*, WHOM ODIN WISHED SLAIN FOR HIS WIFE'S SAKE.

AGAINST ODIN'S WISHES, I *SHIELDED* SIEGMUND INSTEAD-- TILL THE ALL-FATHER HIMSELF DID CAUSE HIM TO BE STRUCK DOWN.

NOW, I HAVE FLOWN HERE SO THAT SIEGMUND'S *BRIDE-WIDOW* WILL NOT FEEL THAT DIVINE WRATH.

WHAT? FOOLISH VALKYRIE-- WILT THOU BRING ODIN'S ANGER DOWN UPON US *ALL* WITH THY MADNESS?

ALREADY, I CAN SENSE HIS *BURNING PRESENCE* DRAWING NEAR FROM WRETCHED *MIDGARD*.*

SEND HER BACK TO HIM-- *QUICKLY!*

*MIDGARD= EARTH. --R.T.

THEY ARE RIGHT, BRUNNHILDA! LET ME GO TO BE WITH MY BELOVED *SIEGMUND!*

WHAT REASON HAVE I FOR *LIVING* NOW?

THE BEST OF *ANY* WOMAN!

'TIS *LOVE*, E'EN MORE THAN *LIFE*, THOU MUST CHERISH FROM THIS DAY FORTH.

THOU ART *WITH CHILD*, SIEGLINDA...

SIEGMUND'S CHILD!

SIEGM--?

THEN *LIVE*, SIEGLINDA! AYE, *LIVE!*

BUT, WHERE CAN I *FLY*--

--IF *VALHALLA* IS NOT SAFE FROM ODIN'S WRATH?

I KNOW OF SUCH A PLACE, MORTAL.

HILDEGARD! IN SOOTH, I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN!

THOUGH I WAS, TILL THIS NIGHT, ODIN'S FAVORITE-- 'TIS *THOU* WHO E'ER HAST TRAVELED MOST WIDELY.

WHERE A SINGLE *NORTHMAN* STRAYS, THERE RIDES *HILDEGARD.*

I KNOW OF A *GREAT FOREST*, TRAVERSED BY FEW--

FOR, 'TIS THERE THE FABLED *NIBELUNG GOLD-HOARD* WAS BROUGHT BY *FAFNIR.*

FAFNIR-- THAT FOUL *STORM GIANT* WHO DID MURDER ONE OF HIS OWN KIND?

AYE, THOUGH HE'S SINCE TURNED INTO *DRAGON* FORM INSTEAD, FOR REASONS HE ALONE DOTH KNOW.

THOU WOULDST TAKE HER-- TO THE *GREAT FOREST*?!

'TIS A *STRANGE* PLACE TO TAKE A HELPLESS, HAPLESS *BRIDE*.

AND YET, SHE'LL BE SAFE THERE IF ANYWHERE FROM ODIN'S WRATH-- FOR, THE ALL-FATHER DOTH *AVOID* THOSE WOODS, AS IF THEY WERE *VENOMOUS*.

BECAUSE HE FEARS THE *RING OF POWER* FORGED BY THE GNOME *ALBERICH*, AYE!

BUT, HOW DOST THOU KNOW THE LORD OF ASGARD WILL NOT PURSUE HER, E'EN *THERE*?

I DO *NOT*-- BUT WHAT OTHER CHANCE *HATH* SHE?

WHATE'ER THOU DOST PLAN TO DO, 'TIS BEST 'TWERE DONE *SWIFTLY*, BRUNNHILDA.

AYE! E'EN NOW, I DO HEAR ODIN DRAW NIGH.

BE NOT FOOLISH, MY SISTERS! BRUNNHILDA HATH *NO INTENT* TO FLEE HERSELF.

'TIS FOR THE *MORTAL* ALONE SHE FEARS, DO YE NOT SEE?

TRUE, HILDEGARD-- OR ELSE ODIN WOULD *O'ERTAKE* US EASILY, AND MY PREVIOUS ACTIONS BE ALL FOR NAUGHT.

'TIS *SIEGLINDA* I SEND, AND SHE *ALONE*-- BUT NOT WITHOUT *THIS*!

VALKYRIE-- *WHAT*--?

THE PIECES OF SIEGMUND'S *SWORD*, WHICH WAS CALLED "*NEEDFUL*"!

'TWAS BOTH *FORGED* BY ODIN, AND *SHATTERED* BY HIM--

YET, HE WHO SWINGS THIS SWORD WHEN 'TIS *FORGED ANEW* SHALL BE NAMED *SIEGFRIED THE VICTOR*--

--AND BE E'EN THE BETTER OF HIS *SIRE*!

MY *THANKS*, DEAR SHIELD-MAID.

NOW *GO*-- FOR THY FATE BE YET IN THE MAKING--

ZZZOT!

-- AND *MINE* BE NIGH AT HAND!

BRUNNHILDA! STAY!

THEN, SUDDENLY, LORD ODIN IS AMONG THE VALKYRIES WHOM HE DID CREATE TO GATHER WARRIOR-SOULS AGAINST THE FINAL DAY OF RECKONING--THE HOUR CALLED RAGNAROK...

WHERE IS BRUNNHILDA?

WHERE BE SHE WHO DARED SET ASIDE THE COMMAND OF ODIN AS IF 'TWERE A CHILD'S PLEADING?

THOU SEEM'ST ANGRY BEYOND MEASURE, ALL-FATHER.

WHAT HAVE THY SPIRITUAL DAUGHTERS DONE TO VEX THEE?

SPORT NOT WITH ME, VIXENS!

I KNOW THE CRIMINAL DOTH HIDE FROM ME.

DO NOT ABET HER CRIME, FOR YOUR OWN SAKES!

SHE CAME HERE AFRAID, FATHER-- AND REPENTANT, I'M CERTAIN!

TETHER THINE ANGER, WE BEG THEE--!

WHAT? AM I SERVED BY WOMANISH WEAKLINGS, AFTER ALL?

STAND ASIDE, YE SHIELD-MAIDENS!

SHE WAS THE DEAREST TO ME OF YE ALL-- BUT SHE'LL NOT ESCAPE MY RIGHTFUL WRATH!

DISPERSE, I COMMAND YE ALL!

AS THOU CANST PLAINLY SEE, ALL-FATHER... HERE I STAND.

I CAN DO NAUGHT ELSE.

PUNISH ME, THEN, IF THOU MUST!

AH, BRUNNHILDA-- THOU AND THY SISTERS BE MY WILL-- MY SPIRIT.

THOU HAST PUNISHED, THEN, THYSELF.

BUT-- WHAT SHALL BE DONE WITH ME? FOR, I KNOW THAT SURELY I SHALL NE'ER AGAIN RIDE FORTH FROM VALHALLA TO GATHER HEROES FOR THY TWILIGHT ARMY.

THOU DOST SENSE A'RIGHT.

FROM THIS TIME FORTH, THOU ART CUT OFF FORE'ER FROM VALHALLA AND FROM ASGARD.

WHAT? MUST THOU TAKE ALL THINGS THAT ONCE THOU DIDST GIVE?

PLEASE, MIGHTY ODIN-- CALL OFF THAT CURSE, AS VILE TO US AS ALBERICH'S WAS TO THEE!

SPEAK NOT TO PUT DECREES IN ODIN'S MOUTH, VALKYRIE!

MINE HURT DOTH DWARF THINE OWN IN THIS HOUR.

NOW, WE GO-- AND MAKE YE NO ATTEMPT TO FOLLOW--

--OR YE WILL SHARE HER FATE, WITHOUT LESSENING IT!

THEY ARE-- GONE!

AYE, THOUGH HER ARMOR HERE REMAINS-- LIKEWISE, HER WEAPONS!

TRULY, WHERE'ER SHE BE-- SHE BE VALKYRIE NO MORE!

WHILE, ON A MOUNTAINTOP ON THE SPINNING MUDBALL EARTH...

IS IT TRULY SO SHAMEFUL, LORD ODIN, WHAT I HAVE DONE?

THOU DIDST DEFY MY COMMAND!

AND BECAUSE THOU DIDST, I WAS FORCED *MYSELF* TO SLAY SIEGMUND-- THOUGH HE DID PARTAKE OF THE ESSENCE OF MINE OWN BLOODSON *THOR!*

BUT NEITHER HE NOR SIEGLINDA DID *KNOW* THAT! THEY--

SILENCE!

HEAR NOW MY *SENTENCE* UPON THEE!

NO MORE SHALT THOU BE VALKYRIE, BUT ONLY A *MORTAL WOMAN*, SUCH AS THOU DIDST SHIELD FROM ME!

A *MAN* SHALL FIND THEE HERE, BECOME THINE *HUSBAND*-- THY NEW *LORD AND MASTER*--

--AND THOU WILT SIT BY HIS *HEARTH*, SPINNING, WHILE THINE HAIR TURNS GRAY!

NNOOO!!

THOU DOST *FEAR* TO AGE?

NOT TO AGE... NOT E'EN TO *DIE*...

BUT LET ME *NOT*, I PRAY THEE, SURVIVE TO WED JUST *ANY* MAN WHO HAPPENS UPON ME!

THE VERY *FIRST* TO SEE THEE!

THEN LET NO *BASE* MAN COME BY, I BEG OF THEE--

--BUT ONLY A *MAN OF WORTH!*

HAVE I NOT EARNED *THAT* MUCH, AT LEAST?

AYE... THOU *HAST.*

RISE, NIGH-GODDESS THAT SOON WILL BE A WOMAN!

THY FINAL REQUEST OF ODIN SHALL BE *MET!*

THEN-- I DO *ACCEPT* MY FATE!

FARE THEE *WELL*, HAPLESS ONE.

I BUT WISH I COULD BRING FORGETFUL OBLIVION TO *MYSELF* AS EASILY AS TO *THEE.*

THEN, WITH A KISS UPON EACH EYEBROW, THE RULER OF ASGARD KISSES HER GODHOOD AWAY...

...AND SHE SINKS UNCONSCIOUS IN HIS STRONG ARMS.

AH, BRUNNHILDA... *BRUNNHILDA!*

I SLEW NOT MINE OWN *SON* WITH GREATER REGRET THAN I HAVE DONE THIS THING UNTO THEE.

NEXT, HE LOOKS DOWN UPON HER WITH A SORROW WHICH EYE CAN STILL FEEL ALL THESE MANY YEARS LATER...

...AND HE STRIKES HIS SACRED SPEAR GUNGNIR THREE TIMES AGAINST THE TOWERING ROCK:

LOKI! HEAR ME, MASTER OF MISCHIEF... AND GOD OF FIRE!

RING THIS ROCK WITH FLAMES-- AND LET THEM BE SUCH AS NE'ER BEFORE DID SEAR EITHER EARTH OR HEAVEN!

NOR SHALL HE WHO HATH FEAR OF ODIN'S SPEAR-POINT E'ER STEP THROUGH THIS FIRE--

...BUT ONLY THE BRAVEST OF MEN, SUCH AS ODIN DOTH NEED, E'EN MORE THAN DOTH BRUNNHILDA!

THEN, HE IS GONE...

INTRIGUING, EYE! BUT WHAT HATH THIS TO DO WITH THOR--

--OR WITH THAT WHICH HE WOULD KNOW?

YOU ARE IMPATIENT STILL, THUNDERER...

...BUT SEE NOW SIEGLINDA, LYING WHERE SHE HAS FALLEN UPON MIDGARD, AND PROMPTLY DISCOVERED:

HO! WHAT'S THIS WHICH MIME SEES?

A MAIDEN-- HERE!?

HELP ME, KIND SIR... PLEASE...!

MIME TOOK HER TO HIS HUT NEARBY, AND CARED FOR HER...

OH, SIEGMUND... SIEGMUND...!

AND IN TIME, HE DELIVERED HER OF A SON...THOUGH HE COULD NOT SAVE HER LIFE.

SIEGFRIED! SHE TOLD ME TO CALL YOU... SIEGFRIED!

THUS, THIS LITTLE MAN REARED THE HEALTHY BLOND SON OF SIEGMUND AND SIEGLINDA...

...WHO GREW STRAIGHT AND TALL AND STRONG...

...AS ANY FOOL OR THUNDER GOD CAN PLAINLY SEE!

BEHOLD SIEGFRIED-- SON OF SIEGMUND-- AND GRANDSON, THOUGH HE KNOWS IT NOT, OF ODIN HIMSELF!

BUT-- 'TIS MYSELF I DO BEHOLD THERE, WITH THE GNOME-LING MIME!

CAN I BE BOTH ODIN'S SON-- AND GRAND-CHILD?

IT IS NOT YOU, THOR-- NOT PRECISELY--!

IT IS, RATHER, YOUR ESSENCE-- DISTILLED INTO MORTAL FORM FOR REASONS YOU WILL SOON LEARN.

THAT, THEN, IS WHY I SAW NOT MYSELF, AS A YOUNGER GOD-LING IN EARLIER VISIONS?

PARTLY, YES... BUT NOW, WATCH ON...

...AS THE DWARF WHO RAISED YOU-- OR RATHER, RAISED SIEGFRIED, WHOM SOME CALL SIGURD-- TOILS AT HIS ANVIL:

KLANK KLANK

WHAT WEARI-SOME MEANING-LESS DRUDGERY!

I FORGE SWORDS FOR HIM-- AND THAT VILE BOY IS FOREVER SNAPPING THEM IN TWO! I SHOULD--

HO! WHAT NOISE IS THAT OUTSIDE?

THE SOUND IS NOT OUTSIDE MUCH LONGER...

KRAKK!

GROWR!R

yYyIIIII

WHY DO YOU *SHRIEK* SO, OLD MIME--

--WHEN I'VE BROUGHT YOU SUCH A PRETTY *PLAYMATE?*

GRRR

PLEASE-- TAKE HIM AWAY! *TAKE HIM AWAY!*

NAY! YOU WERE TO HAVE FINISHED FORGING ME A NEW *SWORD* TODAY-- AND I'VE BROUGHT *BRUIN* HERE TO SEE IT--

--OR ELSE TO *SPEED YOU ALONG,* IF YOU WERE NOT YET DONE!

SNARRRLL

BEAR-- ASK MIME FOR THE *SWORD!*

D-DON'T LET HIM *NEAR* ME! YOUR S-SWORD IS *FINISHED!*

SO? WHY, THEN, I NEED YOU *NO MORE,* FRIEND BEAR.

DO YOU LIKE THIS SIEGFRIED, THOR?

DO YOU SEE MUCH OF YOURSELF, BOTH WHEN YOUNGER AND EVEN TODAY, IN HIM?

SLAMM!

NO MATTER HOW YOU MAY FEEL ABOUT HIS RECKLESS BRAGGADOCCIO, EYE CAN SEE IT IN YOUR EXPRESSION:

YOU ARE TAKEN WITH THIS BLOND GOLIATH, WHO IS AS FAR ABOVE HIS FATHER SIEGMUND IN POWER-- AS YOU ARE ABOVE HIM!

HAH!

BRAK!

HE'S BUT *STUNNED*; I'LL CARRY HIM BACK TO THE WOODS LATER.

I--I DON'T MIND WHEN YOU *KILL* THEM, BUT WHY DO YOU BRING ME BEARS *ALIVE*?

FOR WANT OF *COMPANY*, MIME...

...BETTER COMPANY THAN *YOU* ARE!

YOU SHOULD SHOW MORE *HONOR*, SIEGFRIED, TO ONE WHO BROUGHT YOU UP BY HAND.

NEVER MIND THAT! WHERE'S MY NEW *SWORD*?

HERE, LAD! I MADE IT *SHARP* AS A RAZOR'S EDGE, WHICH SHOULD GLADDEN EVEN *YOUR* HEART.

SHARP, AYE-- I GIVE YOU SHARP.

BUT, WHAT GOOD ITS *CUTTING* EDGE--

--IF THE *STEEL'S* NOT HARD AND. TRUE?

SPLANG!

NOW, YOU *BUNGLER*--!

P-PLEASE! IS THIS WHAT I DESERVE, FOR THE *LOVE* I SHOWERED UPON YOU?

YOU MERELY WISH TO *USE* ME, FOR SOME PURPOSE I'VE NOT YET DIVINED.

USE? NAY--I *LOVE* YOU, DEAR SIEGFRIED-- AS IF YOU WERE MY OWN *SON*.

I'LL *PROVE* IT TO YOU!

YOUR MOTHER, *SIEGLINDA*, GAVE ME THIS-- WHICH SHE SWORE YOUR *FATHER* WIELDED IN THE FIGHT IN WHICH HE WAS SLAIN.

OH? TELL ME *MORE* OF MY PARENTS, I PRAY YOU.

THAT'S *ALL* I KNOW-- SAVE THAT THE SWORD WAS FOR *YOU*, WHEN YOU GREW UP... AND THAT ITS NAME IS "NEEDFUL."

LET ME SEE IT, THEN.

WHAT!? IT'S *BROKEN!* WHAT GOOD IS A BROKEN SWORD TO ME?

MUCH GOOD-- FOR YOUR MOTHER SAID A *GOD* BROKE IT.

THAT BEING SO, NO MERE *MORTAL* WILL BE ABLE TO DEFEAT IT, WHEN IT'S WELDED TOGETHER AGAIN.

THEN *DO* SO, MIME-- AND *QUICKLY*, TOO!

THEN, I'LL SWING MY *RIGHTFUL* SWORD-- WHICH YOU HAVE OBVIOUSLY KEPT *FROM* ME ALL THESE YEARS!

ONLY UNTIL YOU WERE *OLD* ENOUGH-- I *SWEAR* IT!

FORGE IT *SWIFTLY!* IT MUST BE DONE *TODAY!*

YES, I'LL DO IT.

BUT, *WHY* MUST IT BE DONE TODAY, WITHOUT FAIL?

BECAUSE I HAVE DECIDED TO *LEAVE* THIS HOVEL FOREVER, NEVER TO RETURN!

THE GNOMELING *BLANCHES* AT THESE WORDS...

*HOW THEN SHALL HE LEAD HIS BRASH GODSON TO **FAFNIR'S LAIR**-- AND GAIN FOR HIMSELF THE **TREASURE OF THE NIBELUNGS**?*

*FOR, KNOW YOU, THOR, THAT THIS **MIME** HIMSELF IS OF THE **NIBELUNG CLAN**-- DESCENDED FROM VILE **ALBERICH** HIMSELF!*

IT IS *DONE*, DEAR SIEGFRIED!

THIS *HAMMER* WILL TAKE CARE OF-- *A'EEE!*

YOU'VE *SHATTERED* THE SWORD ANEW!

KLANNGK!

I SEE NOW THAT A DUNDERHEAD LIKE YOU CANNOT BE TRUSTED WITH A SWORD THAT *GREAT WARRIORS* AND *GODS* HAVE WIELDED.

AS *ODIN* IS MY WITNESS-- I'LL FORGE THIS SWORD *MYSELF!*

YOU? BUT YOU'VE NEVER EVEN LEARNED THE CRAFT OF SWORDMAKING.

I CAN KNOW NO LESS THAN YOU, IT SEEMS.

YOU STAY HERE-- TO ADVISE ME!

HOWEVER, AS SIEGFRIED BEGINS HIS TASK, IT IS NOT SWORD-MAKING THAT MIME THINKS OF...

...BUT OF A VISITOR THE GNOMELING HAD, NOT LONG AGO...

...A VISITOR HE KNEW INSTINCTIVELY TO BE ALL-FATHER ODIN HIMSELF, AND WHO TOLD HIM:

ONLY ONE MAN EVER MAY FORGE NEEDFUL ANEW--

--THAT MAN WHO HAS NEVER KNOWN FEAR!

MIME, WHO TREMBLES AT THE SHAKING OF A LEAF, KNOWS THAT WILL NOT BE HIMSELF...

...BUT IT MAY WELL BE... SIEGFRIED!

AS THE BLOND YOUTH WORKS... MIME PLOTS.

AND, BY THE TIME SIEGFRIED HAS FINISHED...AND THE SWORD CALLED NEEDFUL RESTS IN HIS STRONG HANDS...

IT LOOKS SHARP, LAD-- BUT IS IT AS STRONG AS YOU WANT?

SIEGFRIED GIVES NO ANSWER OF THE LIPS ONLY...

--BUT OF THE SWORD!

NAME OF NIFLHEIM!

ZRAKKK!

NOW DO YOU SEE, OLD MIME, HOW MY FATHER'S BLADE--*MY* BLADE NOW-- CAN *CLEAVE?*

OH, *Y-YES*, GOOD SIEGFRIED. YOU HAVE EVERYTHING YOU NEED NOW TO GO OFF AND BE A MAN-- A *WARRIOR.*

EVERYTHING, BUT THE *ONE THING* I NEGLECTED TO TEACH YOU ERE NOW, WITHOUT WHICH ALL THE REST IS *USELESS.*

OH? AND WHAT'S *THAT?*

IT'S *FEAR*, LAD! WITHOUT FEAR, YOU'LL NEVER BE A MIGHTY WARRIOR.

WHAT IS THIS "*FEAR*"? I DO NOT KNOW THE WORD.

I DID NOT THINK SO.

I CANNOT EXPLAIN IT, BUT THERE IS ONE I KNOW WHO COULD TEACH YOU-- THE DRAGON *FAFNIR.*

HIS *HATE-CAVERN*, AS IT'S CALLED, IS DUE EAST OF HERE.

HE COULD TEACH YOU FEAR, THAT'S FOR SURE!

THEN I'LL GREET THIS *FAFNIR* FIRST-- THEN GO OUT INTO THE WORLD.

COME, LITTLE MAN!

A-AYE, BUT FIRST LET ME PREPARE *FOOD* AND *DRINK* FOR THE JOURNEY!

GRUDGINGLY, YOU-- OR RATHER, *SIEGFRIED*-- ACQUIESCES, AND SOON...

HURRY, MIME! I'VE NO TIME TO WASTE.

NOR DO *I*, DEAR LAD,

I WOULD SEE YOU TAUGHT THE MEANING OF FEAR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE-- BY *FAFNIR!*

MEANWHILE, UNKNOWN EVEN TO PLOTTING MIME, HIS FATHER ALBERICH RESTS NEAR FAFNIR'S CAVE...

WHEN WILL THE FATEFUL DAY ARRIVE, ALBERICH?

HOW SHOULD I KNOW, GIANT?

I BUT WATCH AND WAIT, AS I'VE HIRED YOU TO DO WITH ME.

OVER THE YEARS, I MAY HAVE CHANGED MY VERY SHAPE... BUT I DO NOT KNOW THE FUTURE.

I KNOW ONLY THAT I WILL HAVE THE RING WHICH FAFNIR POSSESSES, AND THAT--

WHO'S THAT?

A WANDERER ONLY, SIRE.

NAY, FOOL-- FAR MORE THAN SOME MERE HUMAN TRAVELER...

IT'S ODIN HIMSELF-- STILL LORD OF ASGARD, HOWEVER HUMBLE HIS DISGUISE!

HOW DARE YOU COME HERE SKULKING ABOUT AFTER MY RING!

THY RING NO LONGER, GNOMELING-- SINCE IT HATH BEEN LONG IN FAFNIR'S SCALY GRASP.

IT DOTH BELONG NOW TO HIM WHO MAY TAKE IT-- ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

BUT, HOW FELL YOU INTO THE COMPANY OF SUCH LOATHESOME GIANTS AND TROLLS, SUCH AS HELA HATH DOMAIN OVER?

AYE, THEY'RE PART OF HELA'S HORDE, SURE ENOUGH--

--AND ONE DAY, WE SHALL TRAMPLE DOWN THE HIGH WALLS OF ASGARD ITSELF--

--ON THE DAY OF RAGNAROK, WHICH--

AAIEEE!

BEWARE, VILE ONE! THOU HAST NOT THE MAGIC RING NOW.

I BE COME BUT TO WATCH THEE LOSE IT AGAIN.

NAY, NEVER, ONCE I'VE-- EH? NOW SEE WHAT YOU'VE DONE!

YOU'VE AWAKENED FAFNIR-- THAT STORM-GIANT WHO, BY THE POWER OF THE RING AND TARNHELM, IS BECOME A FEARSOME DRAGON--

RRUMMBLLL

AND, BY YMIR'S ARMPITS, YOU'LL FIND HIM *MIGHTIER FAR* THAN WHEN HE BUILT THE WALLS AROUND *VALHALLA!*

L-LOOK OUT! HERE HE *COMES!!*

SO I DO SEE.

WHO DARES ROUSE ME FROM MY DREAMLESS SLEEP?

I AM YOUR *FRIEND*, FAFNIR-- COME TO WARN YOU THAT SOMEONE COMES TO STEAL YOUR *GOLDEN HOARD.*

*IT WOULD NOT BE **YOU**, BY ANY CHANCE?*

NAY, I AM YOUR *FRIEND!*

GIVE ME ONLY THE *RING* WHICH IS THE TINIEST PART OF YOUR TREASURE, AND YOU'LL BE *SAFE* FROM--

NOW *GO*--AND LET ME *SLUMBER* AGAIN!

THE RING IS MINE!

yYyAaAa!

FOOLISH ALBERICH! THOU DOST THINK *ME* THY FOE, BUT ONE COMES WHOM I HAVE NEVER HELPED, NOR EVER *SHALL.*

'TIS *HE* THOU MUST RECKON WITH, NOT THE *LORD OF ASGARD AND VALHALLA!*

FLEE, FRIENDS! BACK TO *HELA!*

THEN, EVEN AS ALBERICH FLEES IN ABJECT TERROR...

THERE, LAD! THERE'S *FEAR* FOR YOU!

IT DOES NOT LOOK VERY APPEALING--BUT WHO'S *THAT* RUNNING AWAY?

LOKI HELP ME, IT'S MY OWN SIRE *ALBERICH!*

I SHOULD HAVE SUSPECTED THAT *HE TOO* STILL COVETED THE-- *AAAAiiii!*

COVETED *WHAT*, MIME?

WHAT IS IT YOU'VE NOT *TOLD* ME, YOU WHO WOULD TEACH ME THE MEANING OF *FEAR?*

YOU'LL LEARN THAT, AND LEARN IT *SWIFTLY*, SIEGFRIED--

--WHEN YOU LOOK INTO THE EYES OF *FAFNIR!*

BY THE SWORD OF MY FATHER!

AYE, GNOME-- I'LL TEACH YOUR LESSON FOR YOU! BUT, WHEN IT'S DONE--

--HE'LL NOT BE *ALIVE* LONG ENOUGH TO PROFIT FROM IT!!

NEXT ISSUE: **DEATH TO THE DRAGON-SLAYER!**

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IT IS A SCENE CONJURED FOR HIM BY THE DISEMBODIED EYE OF HIS ALMIGHTY FATHER-- ODIN, WHICH FOR PURPOSES OF ITS OWN, IS IMPARTING REVELATIONS TO THE STARTLED THUNDER GOD THAT HAVE BEEN KEPT HIDDEN FROM HIM BY THE SELFSAME LORD OF ASGARD!
DRAGON'S BLOOD!
Based on the opera "SIEGFRIED" by Richard Wagner as adapted by Roy Thomas
LF140

RALPH MACCHIO • KEITH POLLARD & CHIC STONE • JOE ROSEN • GAFF • JIM SALICRUP • JIM SHOOTER
SCRIPT ART LETTERS COLORS EDITOR EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

EYE HAVE SHOWN YOU, ODINSON, HOW YOUR DIVINE FATHER DID ATTEMPT TO WREST THE FABLED **RING OF POWER** FROM THE STORM GIANT TURNED DRAGON--**FAFNIR**... HE, TO WHOM ODIN HAD GRUDGINGLY GIVEN IT IN EXCHANGE FOR THE RETURN OF THE GODDESS **IDUNN** AND HER APPLES OF IMMORTALITY, BUT THE ALL-FATHER WAS FORBIDDEN BY HIS OWN OATH TO TAKE BACK THE RING DIRECTLY. YET SO GREAT WAS ODIN'S FEAR OF THE RING'S AWESOME POWER OVER GODS AND MEN--

--THAT HE DIDST IMPART THE ESSENCE OF HIS OWN BLOODSON, THOR, IN **TWO** MORTAL INCARNATIONS TO UNKNOWINGLY CARRY OUT THE DEED OF ACQUISITION IN HIS STEAD!

BUT THE FIRST-- ***SIEGMUND***-- WAS SLAIN BY ODIN AT THE BEHEST OF HIS WIFE, ***FRIGGA***, WHEN SHE DIS-COVERED SIEGMUND'S TRANSGRES-SIONS OF SACRED MARRIAGE VOWS.

AND THE SECOND-- **SIEGFRIED**, SIEGMUND'S "SON," NOW CONFRONTS FAFNIR AT HIS CAVE, ACCOMPANIED BY THE EVIL DWARF **MIME**, WHO RAISED SIEGFRIED IN THE HOPE THAT HE WOULD ONE DAY KILL THE DRAGON. THUS, THE RING OF POWER WOULD FALL INTO MIME'S GRASPING HANDS.

NEARBY, **ALBERICH**, MIME'S BROTHER, WHO FORGED THE DREADED RING FROM THE PRICELESS **RHINEGOLD**-- BEFORE LOSING IT TO ODIN THROUGH TRICKERY-- KEEPS WATCH...

...FOR HE, TOO, COVETS THE GLEAMING BAND.

AND ODIN HIMSELF, IN HIS EARTHLY GUISE OF THE **WANDERER**, AWAITS WHAT MAY BE THE CLIMAX OF EVENTS HE SET IN MOTION SO LONG AGO.

WITH THE DRAGON'S APPROACH-- THE COWARDLY MIME PANICS... BARELY ABLE TO BLURT OUT THAT THE MONSTER'S HEART IS IN THE SAME PLACE AS IN ANY OTHER BEAST.

AS THE BATTLE NEARS COMMENCEMENT, THE DWARFISH ONE HURRIED-LY SEEKS SHELTER...

...WHILE SIEGFRIED PAYS HOMAGE TO HIS SACRED SWORD "NEEDFUL," FORGED FROM THE FRAGMENTS OF THE BLADE HIS FATHER SIEGMUND SHATTERED IN FINAL BATTLE.

BUT AS HE KNEELS, SIEGFRIED'S MEDITATIONS ARE INTERRUPTED...

EH? WHY DO YOU ALIGHT UPON MY SHOULDER, BIRDLING, AND SING WITH SUCH FERVOR AS IF A MESSAGE YOU CARRIED TO ME? STRANGE... A QUARRELSOME DWARF ONCE TOLD ME HE KNEW WHAT BIRDS WERE SAYING IN SONG-- AND MEN MIGHT FIND THE MEANING. BUT HOW?

IT IS YOUR DEATH-SONG WHICH THE WINGED ONE CHIRPS... YOUR REWARD FOR SEEKING FAFNIR IN HIS LAIR-- HATE-CAVERN.

A REWARD I SHALL NOT KEEP FROM YOU MUCH LONGER!

SWAKK!

UHHHH!

NAY, DRAGON, IT IS NOT DEATH I COME SEEKING-- *NEVER* DEATH! THERE IS ANOTHER PRIZE WHICH SHALL MAKE MY VICTORY EVER SWEET!

AHHH, THE FOOLISH GNOME WHO WAS AT YOUR SIDE, HE DID SPEAK OF FEAR--AND HOW I MAY TEACH IT TO THEE. WELL, IF THAT IS WHY YOU HAVE SOUGHT ME, THEN YOU SHALL LEARN ALL--

WHUKK!

--FROM THE FIERY BREATH OF FAFNIR!

RAKK!

SKRAKK!

YOU ANSWER NOT. IS THE LESSON LEARNED, MY TINY FOE?

IT IS NOT EVEN *BEGUN*, FAFNIR!

BUT I SHALL LEARN OF FEAR FROM YOU THIS DAY-- OR I SHALL CLEAVE YOUR SCALY FLESH FROM YOUR BONES!

SWIKK

YOU NEEDN'T DO THAT, BLONDHAIR, FOR GLADLY WILL I SHOW YOU WHY ALL WHO LIVE FEAR THE DWELLER OF THE HATE-CAVERN.

BUUUMP!

BUT WHY DO YOU SEARCH OUT THAT WHICH CAN ONLY *DIMINISH* YOUR MIGHTY STATURE?

DIMINISH--*YOU LIE!* THE DWARF MIME, WHO RAISED ME, HAS SAID THAT I POSSESS ALL THE ATTRIBUTES NECESSARY TO BECOME THE MIGHTIEST WARRIOR OF ALL--ALL ATTRIBUTES SAVE ONE... I MUST KNOW AND EXPERIENCE *FEAR!*

AND BY ALL THE GODS ABOVE AND BELOW--YOU *SHALL*, DRAGON! *YOU SHALL!*

AND OF ALL WHO LIVE, SAID MIME, ONLY *YOU* COULD INSTRUCT ME IN THE WAYS OF FEAR!

YET ALL THAT I FELT UPON YOUR SLITHERING APPROACH WAS *JOY*-- JOY IN DOING THAT WHICH I WAS BORN TO DO -- STRUGGLE AND STRIKE AND SURVIVE!

YOU BOASTED, MONSTER, THAT MY LESSON WOULD BE SWIFT AND COMPLETE. BUT NOW YOU FLEE ERE IT MAY BE TAUGHT!

STILL, YOUR FLIGHT IS USELESS. I WILL REMAIN WITH YOU IF NEED BE-- A MERCILESS GADFLY BUZZING ABOUT YOUR GREAT HEAD, STINGING AT WILL UNTIL THE KNOWLEDGE I SEEK IS MINE!

SHLANKK!

YARRRRRR!

NOW SHALL I STRIKE WHILE HAVING GAINED FAVORED POSITION... NOW SHALL *NEEDFUL* DRINK DEEPLY-- ***HALVING*** YOUR SIGHT!

RRRAAAHHH!

AWAY, NOISOME FLEA! YOUR INFERNAL BOASTING VEXES ME MORE THAN THE LOSS OF A HUNDRED EYES COULD!

OHHH...WOULD THAT ALL WHO OPPOSED ME IN THE PAST DID BATTLE WITH THE FEROCITY OF FAFNIR. BUT NOW HE IS FLED--AND WITH HIM, WHATEVER CHANCE OF BECOMING A WARRIOR IN BODY AND SOUL.

BUT HOLD--A DARK SHADOW FROM ABOVE PASSES OVER ME, BLOTTING OUT THE SUN! COULD IT BE--

KKRRAACHH!

FAFNIR RETURNS, CURSED ONE! DOES THE UNHOLY VISION OF MY DRIPPING SIGHT-LESS EYE AT LAST FILL YOU WITH LOATHING-- AND ***FEAR***?! DO YOU KNOW ITS TRUE MEANING AS YOU GAZE UPON ME?!

NAY-- NAY, MONSTER! IT DOES NOT! I FEEL ONLY ANGER AT ONE WHO TAUNTS ME-- WHO SOUGHT TO DECEIVE ME AND PREVENT MY ASCENSION TO WARRIOR-HOOD!

BUT IF I CANNOT WREST THE SECRET OF FEAR FROM YOUR SNARLING LIPS THEN I SHALL AT LEAST BE CERTAIN THAT YOU WILL NOT LIVE TO SPEAK IN MOCKING TONES OF YOUR ILL-CONCEIVED VICTORY.

yYyRRRGGHH!

HO, DRAGON! YOUR SOFT UNDERBELLY IN-VITES A HARDY THRUST! NEEDFUL HAS FOUND ITS MARK IN THE HEART BEHIND YOUR HEAVING BREAST.

YOUR SLAVERING JAWS HAVE RENT THEIR LAST VICTIM. BY MY HAND DO YOU DIE THIS DAY!

NO!! NOT LIKE THIS, BLONDHAIR! NOT IN THIS FALSE FORM WILL I PERISH AND ROT! NEVER!

WHOOUUFF!

E'EN IN HIS DEATH THROES, THE BEAST IS POSSESSED OF MIGHT ENOUGH TO HURL E'EN ME AWAY!

NOT AS SHARP-TOOTHED LIZARD WILL FAFNIR HIE TO HIS REST... BUT AS JOTHUNHEIM-BORN ***STORM GIANT*** WILL I LIE FOR ETERNITY, FOOD FOR THE FAMISHED BUZZARDS.

GRANT ME ONE REQUEST ERE I DIE... TELL ME WHO YOU ARE, FAIR SIEGFRIED, WHAT IS YOUR TRUE NATURE?

MUCH OF MY PAST IS SHROUDED IN SHADOW... BUT OF THIS I AM CERTAIN... IT WAS YOUR ***SILENCE*** WHICH SPURRED MY MURDEROUS DEED-- SO THAT I NOW LAY SPATTERED WITH YOUR BLOOD. BLOOD THAT I ***TASTE*** AS IT RUNS FREELY INTO MY MOUTH!

I--I FEEL STRANGE, AS IF NEW PERCEPTIONS WERE AWAKENING WITHIN ME...AS IF I WOULD SOON COME TO UNDERSTAND THINGS WHICH HAVE OF LATE CONFOUNDED ME.

HEED ME, STRIPLING--THERE IS LITTLE TIME. MY OWN BROTHER, ***FASOLT***, DID I KILL IN THE PAST TO OBTAIN THE FATAL RHINEGOLD, WHICH WAS STOLEN FROM THE RHINEMAIDENS BY ALBERICH-- HE WHO WAS WITHOUT LOVE.

WHY DO YOU SPEAK THIS TALE OF WOE, GIANT?

BECAUSE THE COVETED HOARD IS YOURS NOW, WON UPON MY DEATH. BUT BEWARE, BLOSSOMING HERO... FOR TREASON FOLLOWS HE WHO HOLDS IT. AND THE ONE WHO PLOTTED FOR YOU THIS TERRIBLE DEED... SHAPES YOU FOR DEATH. UHHHH...

GONE. HE SPOKE OF A RING BEFORE... PERHAPS IT, TOO, IS PART OF THE TREASURE.

IT GLOWS BRIGHTLY-- AND HOW EASILY IT SLIDES FROM THE GIANT'S FINGER. WITH MY NEW-FOUND AWARENESS I SEEM TO SENSE IT CALLING ME-- WHISPERING TO ME IN THE DARK RECESSES OF MY MIND.

AND NOW IT ***SHRINKS*** AS IF BY DESIGN, TO THE SIZE SUITABLE FOR A MAN.

THE RING... 'TWAS *MEANT* TO BE MINE-- INTENDED FOR ME... NONE SHALL E'ER WREST IT AWAY. IT FILLS ME WITH A SENSE OF PURPOSE AND POWER BEYOND E'EN THAT OF *NEEDFUL* ITSELF.

FAFNIR DID SPEAK OF A TREASURE-- A HOARD OF PRICELESS GOLD AND GEMS HE GUARDED. THEY MUST LAY HERE IN HIS SHUNNED HATE-CAVERN.

AHHH, THE YOUNG FOOL HAS TRIUMPHED OVER THE DRAGON. HE WEARS THE RING WHICH THROUGH MALEVOLENT MEANS I SHALL SOON ATTAIN-- AND END HIS BUMBLING LIFE AS WELL.

WHERE ARE YOU SLINKING OFF TO, ACCURSED BROTHER? WHAT DEVIOUS ACT HAVE I CAUGHT YOU IN THE MIDST OF?

EH? *ALBERICH?!*

WHAT I HAVE ACHIEVED THROUGH TOIL AND CUNNING SHALL NOT BE TAKEN FROM ME, THOUGH *YOU* FASHIONED THE RING-- IT WAS STOLEN FROM YOU AND GIVEN OVER TO THE WRETCHED FAFNIR.

MY WAIT HAS BEEN LONG, BUT THE YOUNGLING SHALL SOON TURN HIS BOOTY OVER TO MIME-- WHO RAISED HIM FROM YOUTH AS IF A SON.

MUST YOU HOARD WITH GREED WHAT THE STRIPLING HAS WON FOR YOU?

I'D RATHER THE RING WENT TO A MANGY DOG THAN YOU, LOUT-- YOU'LL *NEVER* POSSESS IT.

SHOULD YOU ATTEMPT ITS THEFT, ALBERICH-- I SHALL CALL FOR VALIANT SIEGFRIED, TO HELP WITH HIS TRUSTY SWORD. THE DAUNTLESS BOY WILL MAKE YOU PAY, BROTHER OF MINE.

HAH! YOU SPEAK EMPTY THREATS, BROTHER-- PROMPTED BY YOUR EVIDENT FEAR.

WHILE INSIDE FAFNIR'S DARK CAVE-- FEAR IS THE LAST THING UPON A STUNNED SIEGFRIED'S MIND.

SUCH RICHES-- A KING'S RANSOM AT A GLANCE. WHO COULD HAVE BELIEVED? AND THIS MAGNIFICENT WAR CLOAK I HAVE FOUND HERE-- IT SHALL REPLACE THE ONE LOST IN BATTLE.

HMMM... THAT GLEAMING *HELMET* ALSO CATCHES MY EYE.

THE BROAD-SHOULDERED MAN STRIDES INTO THE BRIGHT SUNLIGHT AND IS ACCOSTED BY A SINGING FOREST BIRD.

YON BIRD SPEAKS AGAIN--YET NOW ITS LANGUAGE TO ME IS SOMEHOW CLEAR!

IT WARNS THAT MIME PLOTS TREACHERY AGAINST ME--BUT THAT I MAY READ HIS INNERMOST THOUGHTS...FOR FAFNIR'S BLOOD WHICH I HAVE TASTED IS CHARMED.

NO DOUBT HE WEIGHS THE BOOTY'S WORTH. THUS, I MUST SPRINKLE HIM WITH SUGARY, TRUTHLESS TALK TO OUTWIT THE SWAGGERING LAD.

WELCOME, SIEGFRIED. I HAVE BROUGHT YOUR HELMET TO YOU.

MY THANKS, MIME. I HAD THOUGHT IT LOST--NOW I SHALL PLACE IT OVER MY NEW-FOUND HELMET.

SAY, MY BOLD ONE, WHAT IS THE MEANING OF FEAR?

NO TEACHER YET HAVE I FOUND.

BUT THE DRAGON... YOU HAVE DESTROYED HIM.

THOUGH QUITE A TERRIBLE FOE, HIS DEATH *GRIEVES* ME, FOR FAR MORE WICKED ROGUES REMAIN ALIVE AND UN-PUNISHED.

YOUR THIRST MUST BE GREAT AFTER SUCH A MIGHTY ENCOUNTER. HERE, DRINK OF THE WINE FROM THIS FLAGON I HAVE BROUGHT YOU.

HE SUSPECTS NOT THAT THE LIQUID IS POISONED, ONCE IT HAS PASSED HIS LIPS, THE RING AND TREASURE WILL FALL TO ME.

I THANK YOU, GENEROUS MIME.

I THANK YOU FOR REVEALING YOURSELF AS MURDERER!

THIEF! YOU PLOT FOR MY SWORD AND ALL I HAVE FOUGHT FOR--RING, HELMET AND BOOTY.

SO, MY SCHEMES ARE KNOWN TO YOU, EH? NO MATTER, FOR YOUR DEATH SHALL NOW COME BY THE BLADE RATHER THAN THE BOTTLE.

AWAY WITH YOU, DISGUSTING DWARF. MY LIFE SHALL NOT BE FORFEIT FOR GLEAMING BAUBLES, HOWEVER VALUABLE!

SPLUSH!

AGGGHHH! FAFNIR'S BLOOD--I'VE SWALLOWED IT! IT SEIZES MY THROAT LIKE A THING ALIVE-- CHOKING ME-- AKKK...I CANNOT BREATHE. *CURSE YOU, SIEGFRIED...*

...CCCUU-UUURRRR-SSSSSSE YOOOU-UUUU...

HE DIES, POISONED BY THE VERY SUBSTANCE WHICH DID SPARK MY STRANGE ***AWARENESS*** AND THUS DID SAVE ME FROM THE ABYSS.

AND NOW SHALL I CLOSE THE HATE-CAVERN ***FOR-EVER*** SEALING INSIDE-- MIME... WHO SOUGHT THE GOLD WITH RESOLUTE CRAFT... AND I MAKE THE CARCASS OF FAFNIR GUARDIAN ETERNAL OF HIS FAVORED HOARD.

MOMENTS LATER, SIEGFRIED HEFTS HIS HUGE BURDEN INTO THE CAVE ENTRANCE, AFTER PLACING THE BODY OF THE DWARF WITHIN.

HERE SHALL YOU LIE, MY DRAGON FOE. TAKE CARE OF THE SACRED TREASURE-- SHARE IN ITS WATCH WITH YOUR BOOTY-COVETING MATE, AND SO I LEAVE YOU BOTH IN ***PEACE.***

SIEGFRIED SHALL NOT PARTAKE OF YOUR GOODS, FOR ***GREATER*** TREASURES AWAIT ME.

MY TASK ACCOMPLISHED--AND AGAIN THE BIRDLING APPROACHES. HEARKEN, WINGED ONE...MY MOTHER DIED, MY FATHER FELL--UNKNOWN BY THEIR SON. MY ONLY FRIEND WAS A VILLAINOUS DWARF AND I WAS FORCED TO DELIVER HIM TO ***DEATH.***

TELL ME NOW, COULD YOU FIND A LOVING FRIEND FOR ME? I HAVE OFTEN CALLED AND YET NO ONE HAS COME. YOU, MY FAITHFUL, SURELY YOU COULD ***FIND*** ONE... YOU COUNSEL ME SO WELL. NOW SING, I'LL LISTEN TO YOUR SONG.

TWEET! TWEET!

YOU SPEAK OF A WONDERFUL WOMAN WHO SLEEPS SURROUNDED BY FIRE, HIGH ON A MOUNTAIN OF ROCK. AND HE WHO STEPS THROUGH THE FLAMES, WAKENS THE BEAUTIFUL ***BRUNNHILDA.***

BUT HE WHO WINS THE BRIDE, LACKING IN ***FEAR*** MUST HE BE. AND...THAT IS ***I.*** THIS DAY I TOILED TO LEARN FEAR, BUT IN VAIN. I'M BURNING WITH JOY NOW TO LEARN IT FROM THE FAIR BRUNNHILDA.

*NOT FAR AWAY, SITS THE PRIME MOVER OF THESE AWESOME EVENTS--**ODIN,** LORD OF ASGARD, WHO HAS COME TO EARTH AS THE **WANDERER** TO OBSERVE.*

HE RESTS QUIETLY, WHILE THOUGHTS ONLY A GOD MAY KNOW DRIFT THROUGH HIS BRAIN.

BUT TO THE CASUAL WATCHER... HE SEEMS BUT AN AGED MORTAL, DOZING PEACEFULLY.

IT IS AS HE WISHES.

I SEE THAT SIEGFRIED COMES. NOW SHALL THIS WORLD-SPANNING TAPESTRY HAVE FURTHER STRANDS WOVEN THROUGH ITS FABRIC.

OLD MAN--AWAKEN! YOUR MASSIVE BULK BLOCKS THE PATHWAY UP YON MOUNTAIN WHICH LEADS TO THE MAID ON THE ROCKS.

THE WAY THE WOOD BIRD HAS SHOWN YOU--YOU SHALL NOT TAKE! I RISE TO PREVENT IT!

OLD FOOL, I'VE NO TIME FOR PRATTLING. OUT OF MY WAY OR FACE THE SLASHING STEEL OF ***NEEDFUL!***

WHO ARE YOU, OLD MAN, THAT YOU WOULD DARE BAR MY PATH? *SPEAK* OR I'LL SLAY YOU WHERE YOU STAND!

THE SLEEPING MAID OF THE ROCK IS CHAINED BY *MY* MIGHT. HE WHO WOULD WAKE HER MUST WALK THROUGH FLAMES TO HER.

THAT FLAMING SEA CAN SEIZE AND DEVOUR YOU. GO *BACK*, FOOL-HARDY BOY! GO BACK!

I SHALL HINDER YOUR WAY, FOR STILL DO I HOLD THE MIGHTY *SPEAR* UPON WHICH THE SWORD YOU SWING ONCE BROKE IN BATTLE. ONCE AGAIN, LET IT SPLINTER UPON THIS SPEAR.

SO *YOU* ARE MY FATHER'S *FOE* WHO SLEW HIM IN THE PAST AFTER HE SHATTERED *NEEDFUL* UPON YOUR CURSED STICK. BUT I AM FAR MIGHTIER THAN HE -- AND I SHALL PREVAIL!

BRATCH!

FARE ON. YOU HAVE PROVEN YOUR WORTH. I CANNOT PREVENT YOU, AND THUS I LEAVE.

HOW QUICKLY HE FLEES WHEN HIS SPEAR IS *BROKEN* HOW SWEET THE VENGEANCE THAT COMES MY WAY.

E'EN THIS FAR DOWN THE MOUNTAIN, I CAN FEEL THE SEARING HEAT FROM THE FLAMES ABOVE, BUT I'LL BATHE IN THE FIRE... I'LL GO THROUGH WHATEVER FLAMES TO REACH MY *BRIDE!*

BRUNNHILDA! TAKE HEED... YOUR SAVIOR IS UPON YOU! SIEGFRIED COMES!

SIEGFRIED'S STEELY FINGERS GRASP THE SLIGHT OUT-CROPPINGS OF ROCK AS HIS POWERFUL LEGS PROPEL HIM SWIFTLY UP THE MOUNTAINSIDE...

HE ASCENDS TOWARDS THE CIRCLE OF FLAME WHICH RINGS THE UPPERMOST PORTION OF THE CLIFF.

HIS LIMBS WEAKEN UNDER THE DEBILITATING WAVES OF HEAT THAT BUFFET HIM MERCILESSLY-- THREATENING HIS PROGRESS.

BUT HE CONTINUES INCH BY AGONIZING INCH UNTIL HE REACHES THE VERY HEART OF THE **INFERNO** WHERE THE ROAR OF THE BLAZE BECOMES DEAFENING.

THE FIRE IS ALL-- ALL-EMBRACING...ALL-CONSUMING.

BUT THOUGH THE DRAGON-SLAYER FLINCHES IN SEARING PAIN-- NOT FOR AN INSTANT DOES HE KNOW THE FATAL TOUCH OF **FEAR.**

HE WRAPS HIS HARD-WON CLOAK ABOUT HIS MAMMOTH FRAME TO SHIELD HIM FROM THE SCORCHING FURNACE.

HIS JAW SET AS IF CHISELED FROM STONE...SIEGFRIED PRESSES ON. HIS EYES BLAZE NO LESS BRIGHTLY THAN THE FIRE THAT SURROUNDS HIM-- AT HIS FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE SUMMIT HE HAS COME TO ATTAIN.

HIS FLESH IS DRENCHED WITH **SWEAT**... MOISTURE THAT MAKES SLIPPERY THE HAND-HOLDS HE SEEKS WITH ACHING, TORN FINGERS.

AND THEN AT LAST, AFTER AN ETERNITY OF STRIVING AND SUFFERING, SIEGFRIED PLACES A BLOODIED HAND OVER THE MOUNTAINTOP... AND LIKE A **MAN REBORN,** HE SUDDENLY FEELS THE PAIN AND FATIGUE LIFTED FROM HIM LIKE A GREAT WEIGHT.

AHH... AS THE BIRD DID SPEAK TO ME IN SONG... THERE ***BRUNNHILDA*** LAY RADIANT IN REPOSE... AWAITING BUT MY KISS TO AWAKEN HER. I WILL FINALLY KNOW TRUE COMPANIONSHIP.

BUT THE ANGUISH OF LONGING WEAKENS MY SPIRIT. MY HAND... IT TREMBLES AS IT REACHES FORTH. WHAT AILS ME?

IS THIS STRANGE RETICENCE WHAT MEN CALL-- ***FEAR?***

IT MUST BE. FOR I HAVE NEVER KNOWN ITS LIKE, AND TO THINK A WOMAN ASLEEP HAS TAUGHT ME ITS MEANING!

AWAKEN, FAIR ONE... YOUR PRINCE IS HERE.

MY EYES... THEY OPEN TO GAZE UPON A HANDSOME STRANGER.

UNHAND ME, BRUTISH ONE! NO MORTAL DARE LAY HANDS UPON A VALKYRIE IN THE SERVICE OF DIVINE ODIN. BACK AWAY OR TO VALHALLA YOU'LL GO BE-FORE YOUR TIME, HOT-BLOODED OAF!

BRUNNHILDA! WHY DO YOU STRIKE AT ONE WHO HAS RESCUED YOU FROM AN ENDLESS SLEEP? I SEEK ONLY YOUR LOVE... WHY OFFER YOUR ENMITY?

Y-YOU ARE RIGHT. I DID FOR-GET THAT I AM GODDESS... A GATHERER OF SOULS, NO LONGER. ODIN DID STRIP ME OF THAT WHEN I DISOBEYED HIS COMMANDS.

AND HE PLACED ME ATOP THIS LONELY ALP IN A DEATH-LIKE SLUMBER UNTIL ONE SPECIAL MAN WOULD COME TO AWAKEN ME.

HE WOULD BE BOLD AND WORTHY OF A MAIDEN'S LOVE, SAID ODIN, FOR ONLY SUCH A MAN COULD REACH HERE. AND I WOULD DESIRE HIM ONCE I SET EYES UPON HIM.

LOOK AT ME, BRUNNHILDA. ***I*** AM HE OF WHOM THIS ODIN DID SPEAK, FOR I HAVE BREACHED THE WALL OF FLAMES TO CLAIM YOU AS MY OWN.

IT WAS *SIEGFRIED* WHO BROKE THE SPELL PLACED OVER YOU. AND GLADLY WOULD I HAVE FACED A THOUSAND FIRES...A THOUSAND FOES TO BE NEAR YOU FOR AN INSTANT, MAIDEN... I LOVE YOU-- TRULY LOVE YOU.

AND I-- YOU, BRAVE ONE.

ODIN IN HIS WISDOM SENT YOU TO ME, AND THOUGH I HAVE LOST THE LIFE I KNEW AS ONE OF THOSE MOST IN HIS FAVOR... I HAVE FOUND SOMETHING THAT MORE THAN EQUALS THE LOSS-- *YOU!*

THEN WE ARE ONE, AND BECAUSE OF YOU, SWEET BRUNNHILDA-- I HAVE BECOME THE WARRIOR THAT IT WAS DESTINED I BE.

AND AS THE ALL-FATHER HAD INTENDED...THEIR LOVE WAS CONSUMMATED. BUT THERE ARE MACHINATIONS WITHIN MACHINATIONS, THUNDER GOD. THIS PLACID SCENE GIVES NO HINT OF THE WAYS IN WHICH SIEGFRIED'S RING OF RHINEGOLD WILL DIVIDE THEM...SHATTER THEIR HAPPINESS...AND PRESAGE THE VERY TWILIGHT OF THE GODS-- AND THE LIFE OF THOR HIMSELF.

NEXT

THE PENULTIMATE CHAPTER IN *THE RING SAGA--*

PASSIONS AND POTIONS!

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THE MIGHTY

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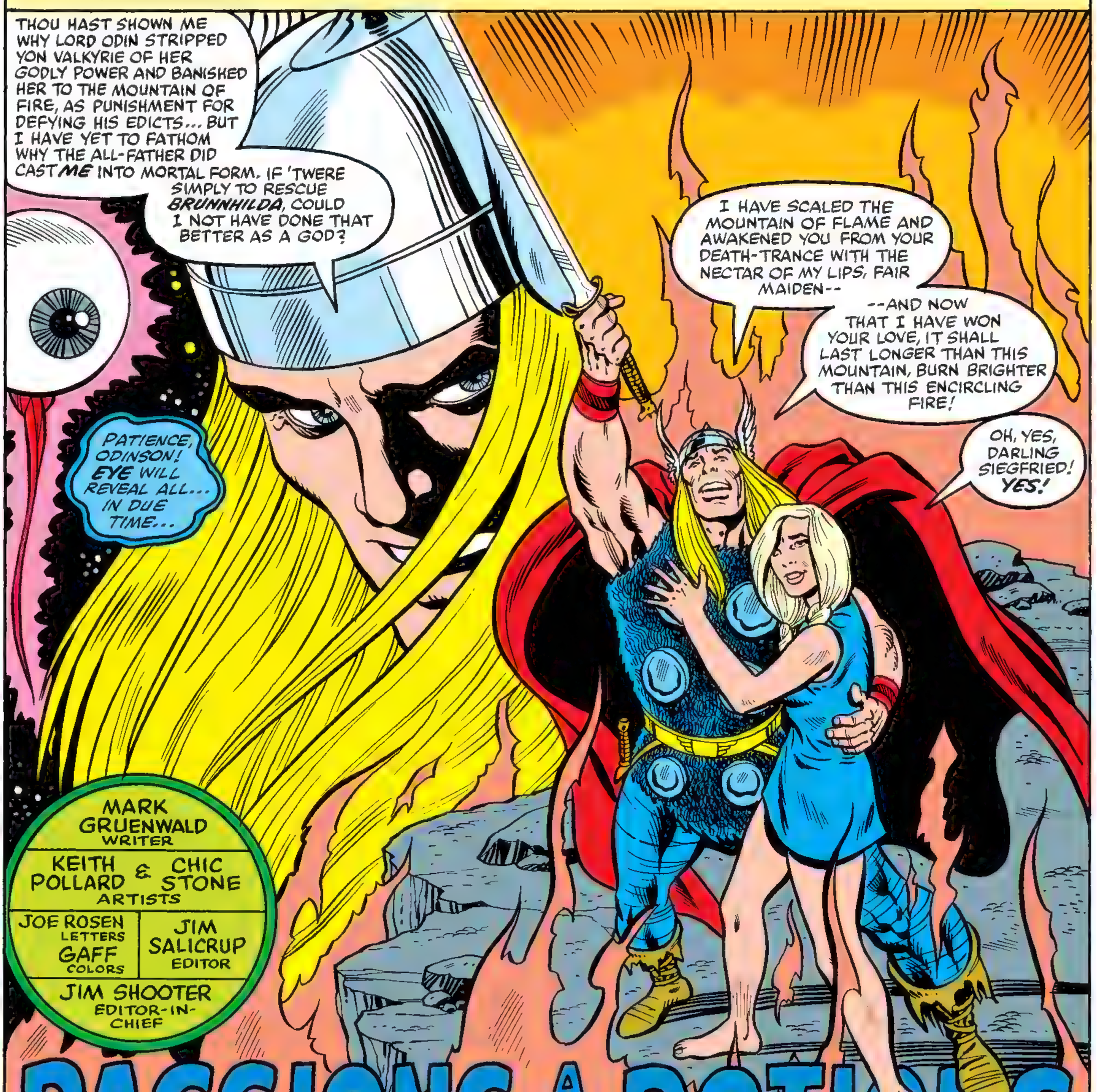
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR!®

ON A WEIRD EXTRA-DIMENSIONAL WORLD, THE MIGHTY **THOR** BEHOLDS A LONG-FORGOTTEN VISION PLUCKED OUT OF HIS OWN MIND BY THE DISEMBODIED **EYE OF ODIN**...

IT IS A VISION OF A PREVIOUS MORTAL LIFE HITHERTO UNKNOWN TO THE THUNDER GOD-- GRANTED HIM BY HIS FATHER **ODIN**, NEARLY A MILLENNIUM AGO.

IN THIS MORTAL INCARNATION, THOR WAS CALLED **SIEGFRIED**, AND IN HIS SHORT EARTHLY LIFE HE HAD ALREADY PROVEN HIMSELF WORTHY OF THE VALIANT SPIRIT DWELLING WITHIN HIM.

THE CLOTHING WORN BY SIEGFRIED RESEMBLED THE RAIMENT OF HIS TRUE SELF, THOR, BUT INSTEAD OF THE URU HAMMER, MJOLNIR, SIEGFRIED WIELDED THE INVINCIBLE SWORD, **NEEDFUL**. INSTEAD OF THE GODDESS **SIF**, SIEGFRIED LOVED THE FORMER VALKYRIE, **BRUNNHILDA**.


THOU HAST SHOWN ME WHY LORD ODIN STRIPPED YON VALKYRIE OF HER GODLY POWER AND BANISHED HER TO THE MOUNTAIN OF FIRE, AS PUNISHMENT FOR DEFYING HIS EDICTS... BUT I HAVE YET TO FATHOM WHY THE ALL-FATHER DID CAST ME INTO MORTAL FORM. IF 'TWERE SIMPLY TO RESCUE BRUNNHILDA, COULD I NOT HAVE DONE THAT BETTER AS A GOD?
PATIENCE, ODINSON! EYE WILL REVEAL ALL... IN DUE TIME...
I HAVE SCALED THE MOUNTAIN OF FLAME AND AWAKENED YOU FROM YOUR DEATH-TRANCE WITH THE NECTAR OF MY LIPS, FAIR MAIDEN--
--AND NOW THAT I HAVE WON YOUR LOVE, IT SHALL LAST LONGER THAN THIS MOUNTAIN, BURN BRIGHTER THAN THIS ENCIRCLING FIRE!
OH, YES, DARLING SIEGFRIED! YES!

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PASSIONS AND POTIONS

Based on the opera "GOTTERDAMMERUNG" by **Richard Wägner** as adapted by **Roy Thomas**

LF167

MILADY, YOU TURN FROM ME, WHAT TROUBLES YOU?

THOUGH IT WOULD PLEASE ME TO KEEP YOU HERE BY MY SIDE IN MY LONELY EXILE, OUR LOVE WOULD BE THE POORER FOR IT.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

WHEN FIRST I BEHELD YOU, MY BELOVED, I GLIMPSED YOUR GREATNESS... THE GODLIKE GRANDEUR SUBDUED WITHIN YOU--

--EVEN AS MINE IS SUBDUED IN ME.

YOU MUST LEAVE ME, SIEGFRIED, GO FORTH AND FULFILL YOUR DESTINY, WHATEVER IT MAY BE.

THE LOVE THAT IS OUR SALVATION HAS THE POWER TO SAVE THE WORLD, AS WELL.

I HAVE A PARTING GIFT FOR YOU, MY DARLING.

WITH THE LAST VESTIGE OF MY GODLY POWER, I CAST ON YOU AN ENCHANTMENT OF INVULNERABILITY.

NO FOE SHALL EVER BE ABLE TO SMITE YOU IN BATTLE UNLESS YOU TURN YOUR BACK TO HIM.

THUS I PROTECT THE BREAST WHICH HOLDS THE HEART I LOVE.

FOR YOU, FAIR ONE, I ALSO HAVE A GIFT. TAKE THIS, THE ***RING OF THE NIBELUNG*** WHICH I WON FROM THE DRAGON FAFNIR.

WEAR IT ALWAYS--AS A SYMBOL OF THE UNDYING LOVE THAT BINDS US.

I SHALL, DEAR SIEGFRIED!

FARE-WELL, MY DEAREST, TILL MY RETURN!

GODSPEED, MY LOVE. BELOW IS MY ONCE-WINGED STEED ***GRANE***.

SPEAK MY NAME TO HIM AND HE WILL BE YOURS.

AND SO, SIEGFRIED GALLOPS OFF TOWARD A RENDEZVOUS WITH DESTINY. HE JOURNEYS FOR A DAY, HIS THOUGHTS FILLED WITH LOVE AND GLORY, UNTIL HE REACHES THE RIVER RHINE...

*...WHERE MILES DOWNSTREAM LIES THE STRONGHOLD OF THE **GIBICHUNG CLAN**, SOON TO BE SIEGFRIED'S DESTINATION.*

IN THE OPEN COURTYARD AT THE CASTLE'S CENTER SITS THE CHIEF OF THE GIBICHUNGS, LORD **GUNTHER**, AND HIS SISTER **GUTRUNA**. WHILE BOTH ARE GOOD AND NOBLE PERSONAGES, THEY ARE SOON TO BE CAUGHT IN A WEB OF EVIL SPUN BY THE DWARFISH VISITOR YOU SEE BEFORE THEM-- A WEB THAT WILL ALSO ENSNARE SIEGFRIED!

GOOD GUNTHER, I PRAY YOU GIVE AUDIENCE TO THE HUMBLE WORDS OF YOUR HALF-BROTHER *HAGEN*...

SPEAK, TREACHEROUS ONE.

YOU WRONG ME, SIRE. I SEEK TO MAKE *AMENDS* FOR THE ILL WIND WHICH HAS LONG BLOWN BETWEEN US.

I DESIRE BUT THE BEST FOR YOUR CLAN-- IS IT NOT ALSO THE CLAN OF MY MOTHER? BUT UNTIL TODAY I REALLY HAD NOTHING TO CONTRIBUTE. I'VE BEEN THINKING...THE FAME OF THE GIBICHUNGS CAN SPREAD NO FURTHER UNTIL YOU AND GUTRUNA FIND *MATES* WORTHY OF YOUR STATION...

...AND I KNOW OF JUST SUCH MATES.

I'VE HEARD OF A MAIDEN LIKE NO OTHER-- AS BEAUTIFUL AS A GODDESS! *BRUNNHILDA* IS HER NAME. SHE DWELLS UPON THE FIRE MOUNTAIN.

THE FIRE MOUNTAIN, EH? AND HOW DO YOU PROPOSE I CLAIM HER? I HAVE NOT THE MIGHT TO BRAVE THE FLAMES!

AND WHO MIGHT MY FUTURE HUSBAND BE?

THERE IS THIS MAN, A GREAT HERO, WHOSE NAME IS SIEGFRIED. HE IS BRAVE ENOUGH TO WIN BRUNNHILDA.

SURELY SUCH A MAN DOES NOT WANT FOR A CONSORT.

HOW MIGHT SUCH A MAN BE MADE TO WOO A MAIDEN IN MY STEAD?

I HAVE ACQUIRED A POTION WHOSE MEREST SIP WILL MAKE A MAN FORGET THOSE HE HAS LOVED...AND ENSLAVE HIM TO THE FIRST WOMAN HE BEHOLDS.

JUST ASK-- AND THE HERO SHALL BE *YOURS*.

HOW DO WE FIND THIS SIEGFRIED?

I'VE SEEN TO THAT, DEAR BROTHER. EVEN NOW THE CLARION SOUNDS HIS ARRIVAL.

AOWOOO

A CASTLE! PERHAPS I SHALL FIND THERE A DEED WORTHY OF MY DARING!

COME, GRANE! LET US INQUIRE OF THE LANDLORD WHAT ADVENTURES MAY BE HENCE.

PERHAPS WE CAN ALSO ENTREAT OUR HOSTS FOR SOME REPAST, EH?

HOLD, STRANGER! NONE MAY TRESPASS THE STRONG-HOLD OF THE GIBICHUNGS UNBIDDEN!

WHAT? I AM BESET BY A COMPANY OF MANNERLESS BRIGANDS!

HAVE AT YOU, THEN, BLACKGUARDS!

OOFF

'TWOULD SEEM YOU'VE NOT HEARD OF HOSPITALITY TO WEARY TRAVELERS! IT IS TIME THE LOT OF YOU WERE *TAUGHT!*

HALT, GOLDHAIR! THERE IS NO NEED FOR FURTHER MAYHEM--

--PARTICULARLY SINCE YOU LEFT *NONE* OF YOUR OPPONENTS STANDING!

AND WHO MIGHT YOU BE, LITTLE MAN?

HAGEN AT YOUR SERVICE, FRIEND.

BLAME NOT THESE MEN FOR THEIR BREACH OF CONDUCT. THEY SIMPLY CARRIED OUT THE ORDERS OF MY BROTHER, LORD GUNTHER-- TO TEST IF YOU WERE INDEED THE TRUE SIEGFRIED.

YOU HAVE HEARD OF ME?

THE VERY RHINE SINGS OF YOUR HEROISM, SIR. NOW COME WITH ME, PLEASE.

AND SO...

GREETINGS, NOBLEMAN! YOU ARE LORD GUNTHER?

I AM HE. YOU MUST FORGIVE MY UNCEREMONIOUS TESTING OF YOUR METTLE, GOOD SIEGFRIED. ONE CANNOT BE TOO CAREFUL IN THESE TIMES.

IN RECOMPENSE FOR MY UNSEEMLY WELCOME, ALLOW ME TO OFFER YOU ANYTHING YOU DESIRE. MY KINGDOM AND ALL IN IT ARE AT YOUR DISPOSAL.

I AM TOUCHED BY YOUR GENEROSITY, SIRE. BUT IT IS NOT FOR WORLDLY THINGS I HAVE COME.

HAD I DESIRED WEALTH, I WOULD HAVE KEPT THE PLUNDER OF THE NIBELUNG CLAN, WHICH I DID RIGHTFULLY WIN BY SLAYING ITS USURPER FAFNIR.

IT IS ADVENTURE I SEEK, AND TO FIND AN EXPLOIT WORTHY OF ME, I INQUIRE OF YOU IF THERE IS ANY BOON YOU MIGHT CRAVE.

HOLD, SIEGFRIED! DID YOU SAY THAT YOU WON THE NIBELUNG HOARD-- AND TOOK YOURSELF NONE OF IT?

WHAT GOOD IS IDLE TREASURE TO A MAN OF ACTION? IT WOULD BUT HAMPER ME.

YOU TOOK *NOTHING* OF IT?

NAUGHT BUT THE HELMET CALLED *TARNHELM* WHICH I WEAR BENEATH MY OWN HEADDRESS...AND A RING OF GOLD.

A *RING?*

YES... BUT THAT I GAVE AWAY.

TRULY RICH IS A MAN WHO REQUIRES NOT THE OBJECTS OF WEALTH ABOUT HIM. LET US DRINK TO YOUR VALIANT EXPLOITS, SELFLESS SIEGFRIED, AND THEN SEE IF WE CAN'T DEVISE ANOTHER!

A TOAST, MILORD?

A TOAST...AYE! TO THE FAIREST OF THE FAIR, THE VESSEL OF MY LONGING, STEADFAST BRUN--

HER NAME AND IMAGE FLEE FROM ME LIKE PHANTOMS.

THE WORLD SPINS BEFORE THE HERO'S EYES-- AND WHEN HE OPENS THEM ONCE MORE...

...*THEY ARE FILLED WITH THE SIGHT OF LADY GUTRUNA.*

THE VERY KNOWLEDGE OF BRUNNHILDA GONE FROM HIS MIND, SIEGFRIED IS SEIZED WITH PASSION FOR THE MAIDEN BEFORE HIM...

MILADY--YOU ARE THE VERY VISION OF LOVELINESS, I AM OVERCOME, PRAY TELL ME YOUR NAME.

GUTRUNA, MILORD.

GUTRUNA... HOW RADIANT A NAME.

BUT... FORGIVE ME. ONE AS FAVORED AS YOU MUST ALREADY BE SPOKEN FOR!

NO, MILORD--

--IT WOULD BE UNSEEMLY FOR ME TO MARRY BEFORE MY ELDER BROTHER DID.

NOBLE GUNTHER, WHY HAVE YOU NOT TAKEN A WIFE?

ALAS, THE WOMAN I WOULD WED IS A PRISONER... ON A MOUNTAIN OF FIRE.

"MOUNTAIN OF FIRE"... IN TRUTH, THAT HAS A FAMILIAR RING.

I DARE NOT RESCUE MY INTENDED, FOR I FEAR THE FIRE.

I FEAR NOTHING, GUNTHER. I WILL ASCEND THE MOUNTAIN FOR YOU--

--IF I MAY HAVE YOUR SISTER'S HAND IN *MARRIAGE*.

AGREED, SIEGFRIED! LET'S SWEAR A BLOOD-OATH ON IT!

OPENING THEIR ARMS WITH A SLICE OF A DAGGER, THE ALLIES DRIP THEIR LIFE-BLOOD INTO A CUP OF WINE...

AND THEN...

BY PARTAKING OF THIS MIXTURE, WE SOLEMNLY SWEAR TO BE TRUE TO ONE ANOTHER UNTO DEATH!

AND IF EITHER OF US BETRAYS THE OTHER, THAT WHICH WE DRINK WILL GUSH FROM OUR BODIES TILL RESTITUTION BE MADE!

SO SAYING, SIEGFRIED MAKES PREPARATIONS TO LEAVE...

AND ONE THING BEFORE YOU GO, GOOD SIR. I HAVE HEARD THAT THE *TARNHELM* GIVES THE POWER TO ALTER ONE'S APPEARANCE AT WILL. THIS MAY BE OF USE TO YOU!

AYE, THAT IT WILL. THANK YOU FOR THIS NEWS.

I'M OFF, MY FRIENDS! QUICK SHALL BE MY RETURN!

HA-*HA!* MY SCHEMES UNFOLD MASTERFULLY. THAT SIMPLE OAF SIEGFRIED WILL FETCH THE MAID WITH THE ALL-POWERFUL *RHINEGOLD*-- AND BRING HER HERE.

SO DOING, I WILL TRICK GUNTHER INTO HAVING SIEGFRIED KILLED. THEN THE RING OF POWER THAT MY SIRE *ALBERICH* LOST BEFORE I WAS BORN WILL BE RIPE FOR THE PLUCKING!

AND WITH THE RHINEGOLD RING TO TRANSFORM MY EVERY THOUGHT INTO REALITY, I SHALL *RULE* ALL GODS AND MEN!

IN THE REALM OF ODIN'S EYE...

HMMMM. THIS HAGEN HAS THE DEMEANOR OF THE GOD OF MISCHIEF HIMSELF!

SHOW ON, ORB. I AM ANXIOUS TO GET TO THIS TALE'S END!

VERY WELL, IMPATIENT ONE. LET US TRAVEL AHEAD OF YOUR EARTHLY COUNTERPART TO HIS DESTINATION, THE VALKYRIE'S MOUNTAIN, WHERE **BRUNNHILDA** PATIENTLY AWAITS HER LOVED ONE'S EVENTUAL RETURN...

OH, SIEGFRIED... IF ONLY YOU COULD HAVE TAKEN ME ON YOUR QUEST FOR GLORY INSTEAD OF LEAVING ME HERE...

BUT I DARE NOT INVOKE ODIN'S ANGER BY MY DISOBEDIENCE AGAIN, I WAS FORTUNATE TO HAVE ESCAPED WITH THE MERE STRIPPING OF MY IMMORTALITY FOR MY FORBIDDEN AID OF YOUR MOTHER!*

*AS SHOWN IN **THOR** #297. -- JIM.

AND, THEN, THROUGH A RIPPLE IN SPACE...

BRUNNHILDA, MY SISTER! HAIL!

WHO--?

VALTRAUTA, MY OLD COMRADE-IN-ARMS! BRING YOU GOOD NEWS? HAS ODIN LIFTED MY BANISHMENT TO THIS DESOLATE MOUNT?

I FEAR NOT, MY SISTER.

IT IS A GRAVE MATTER THAT MAKES ME RISK ODIN'S WRATH TO VISIT YOU HERE.

IT CONCERNS THIS *RING* YOU WEAR.

I HAVE HEARD ODIN SPEAK OF IT WHILE BROODING. IT IS *ACCURSED* BY AN ENEMY OF ASGARD.

ILL WILL COME TO ANY WHO WEAR IT. IT MUST BE PURGED OF ITS EVIL BY--

NO, VALTRAUTA-- THERE IS NO CURSE ON THIS RING! IT WAS GIVEN ME BY THE MAN WHO HAS WON MY HEART-- AS A SYMBOL OF OUR BETROTHAL.

I HAVE GIVEN UP MY **GODHOOD**, IS THAT NOT ENOUGH?

I SHALL NOT GIVE UP THE RING!

THERE WOULD SEEM NO DISSUADING YOU. AND SINCE THE RING CANNOT BE REMOVED AGAINST ITS WEARER'S WILL-- I SHALL GO.

I ONLY HOPE, BRUNNHILDA, THAT YOUR STUBBORN-NESS HAS NOT DOOMED US ALL!

WITH VALTRAUTA'S DISAPPEARANCE, THE MYSTIC FLAMES THAT DANCE ABOUT THE MOUNTAINTOP SUDDENLY SURGE WITH RENEWED FURY...

...AS IF STOKED BY ODIN'S IRE.

WHILE BELOW, THE ENSORCELLED SIEGFRIED BEGINS ONCE MORE THE TORTUOUS ASCENT TO THE MOUNTAIN'S SUMMIT.

BUT WHILE LAST TIME HE CLIMBED, TO CLAIM HIS OWN LOVE, THIS TIME IT IS IN THE SERVICE OF GUNTHER.

HOURS LATER...

I HAVE REACHED THE HEIGHT WHERE THE MOUNTAIN IS CIRCLED BY RAGING FIRE.

BUT BEFORE I BREACH THIS FIERY BARRIER, THERE IS A TASK TO WHICH I MUST FIRST ATTEND.

TOUCHING THE MAGIC TARNHELM HIDDEN BENEATH HIS OWN HELMET, SIEGFRIED DRAWS UPON ITS SHAPE-SHIFTING POWERS--

--TO TRANSFORM HIS ASPECT TO THAT OF GUNTHER'S!

THE TRANSFORMATION COMPLETE, SIEGFRIED STORMS INTO THE CRACKLING FIRE...

NOW WHEN THE MAIDEN OF THE ROCK BEHOLDS HER RESCUER, IT WILL BE ***GUNTHER*** SHE SEES!

AT LAST...

DARLING-- IS THAT YOU WHO DEFIES THE FLAMES? CAN YOUR QUEST BE OVER SO SOON?

NO, WOMAN! 'TIS *I*, GUNTHER OF THE GIBICHUNGS, WHO SEEKS YOU THIS DAY!

BUT HOW CAN THIS BE? I WAS TOLD THERE IS BUT *ONE* BOLD ENOUGH TO PASS THROUGH THE INFERNO UNSCATHED!

I AM HE, LOVELY ONE, AND I COME TO CLAIM YOUR HAND IN MARRIAGE!

NO! I AM ALREADY SPOKEN FOR!

SEE THIS RING UPON MY FINGER? IT IS A SYMBOL OF--

THIS RING BELONGS TO *ME!* I DO NOT KNOW HOW YOU CAME BY IT--, BUT BY THE BLOOD OF THE DRAGON, I SHALL HAVE IT BACK!

NO! YOU CAN'T!

AH, BUT I CAN, FAIR ONE, THE RING IS MINE!

BUT-- ONLY HE WHO PLACED THE RING UPON MY FINGER HAS THE POWER TO REMOVE IT! WHAT MANNER OF DEMON ARE YOU TO DEFY ENCHANTMENTS AS IF THEY WERE IDLE MOUTHINGS?

NO DEMON AM I. SIMPLY A MAN OF MIGHT.

THINKING ODIN HIMSELF HAD FORSAKEN HER, THE MORTAL VALKYRIE SWOONS...

...TO BE SWEPT UP IN THE POWERFUL ARMS OF SIEGFRIED, WHOSE TRUE FORM TWINKLES INTO VIEW AS BRUNNHILDA'S EYES CLOSE...

MAIDEN--? SHE'S FAINTED. STRANGE, BUT THERE IS SOMETHING OF THE FAMILIAR ABOUT HER... ABOUT ALL THIS!

BUT THIS IS NO TIME TO PONDER TRIFLING ENIGMAS. I HAVE SWORN A BLOOD OATH TO GUNTHER TO RETURN FORTH-RIGHT WITH BRUNNHILDA. AND SO I SHALL!

WITH A MIGHTY BOUND, SIEGFRIED VAULTS THROUGH THE FLAMES, BEARING THE UNCONSCIOUS VALKYRIE IN THE PROTECTIVE CRADLE OF HIS RING-HAND...

WHILE ON THE LEFT BANK OF THE RHINE NEAR THE CASTLE OF THE GIBICHUNGS, **HAGEN** SLUMBERS.

SLEEPING, HAGEN, MY SON?

ALBERICH! WHY HAVE YOU COME HERE?

AS IF IN A DREAM, HE IS STARTLED BY A STRANGE VISITATION...

YOUR SIRE BRINGS YOU GOOD TIDINGS, YOUR PLAN TO AVENGE MY DISGRACE GOES WELL.

SO POWERFUL WAS MY HATE THAT CURSED THE RHINEGOLD RING--

--THAT **ODIN** HIMSELF BELIEVES THAT THE DOWN-FALL OF ASGARD IS AT HAND BECAUSE OF IT.

HE HAD HOPED THAT HIS GOD-SON SIEGFRIED MIGHT YET WIN THE DAY BY ***PURGING*** IT OF MY CURSE...

...BUT THANKS TO YOUR MACHINA-TIONS, THIS SEEMS MOST UNLIKELY. YOU HAVE DONE YOUR FATHER ***PROUD*** HAGEN.

I THANK YOU FOR THIS NEWS, FATHER. WHEN THE GODS PERISH, WE DWARVES SHALL ***INHERIT*** THE WORLD AND THE NAME OF ALBERICH SHALL BE ON EVERY TONGUE!

THE SPECTRAL IMAGE OF ALBERICH VANISHES --

"--AND THE LONG SHADOWS OF THE NIGHT SOON FADE INTO DAWN...

HO, HAGEN! I HAVE RETURNED!

YOUR MISSION WAS A SUCCESS, I SEE. HOW WONDERFUL!

SOON, IN THE PALACE OF THE REAL GUNTHER...

AS YOU CAN SEE, GUNTHER, I HAVE MET MY SIDE OF THE BARGAIN.

SPLENDID, SIEGFRIED, SPLENDID. BUT WHY IS SHE SLEEPING?

SHE IS AFAINT FROM THE STRAIN OF BEING RESCUED, I IMAGINE.

HANDMAIDENS, TAKE THE LADY BRUNNHILDA TO HER NEW QUARTERS AND PREPARE HER FOR TONIGHT'S WEDDING FEAST!

YES, MAJESTY.

PLEASE, SIEGFRIED, TRANSFORM BACK TO YOUR TRUE ASPECT.

CERTAINLY, MILADY. IT IS MERELY A MATTER OF LAYING MY HAND ON THE TARNHELM--

--AND WILLING MY OWN VISAGE TO REAPPEAR!

AND NOW, FAIR MAID, LET ME PARTAKE OF YOUR BEAUTY JUST A MOMENT BEFORE YOU MUST ATTEND TO YOUR PRENUPTIAL TASKS.

SWEET, SIEGFRIED, HOW YOUR NEARNESS MAKES MY MAIDEN'S HEART FLUTTER.

HOW EXCELLENTLY YOUR SCHEME HAS BORNE FRUIT, HAGEN. BRUNNHILDA IS A MOST COMELY GIRL-- A FINER QUEEN NO MAN COULD ASK FOR.

MY SISTER SEEMS SMITTEN WITH SIEGFRIED AS WELL. YOU WILL BE RICHLY REWARDED FOR YOUR COUNSEL.

I KNOW, MILORD.

UNAWARE OF THE FULL MEANING OF HAGEN'S RETORT, GUNTHER SUMMONS ALL HIS KIN, THE ENTIRE **GIBICHUNG CLAN**, FOR HIS WEDDING BANQUET...

THAT NIGHT, FESTIVITIES LURCH INTO FULL SWING WITH A FEAST...

DO **EYE** SEE THE GLINT OF RECOGNITION ON YOUR FACE, **FRIEND THOR**? HAVE YOU NOT ATTENDED A NUMBER OF VIKING WEDDINGS IN YOUR YOUTH? THIS ONE IS LIKE UNTO THOSE WITH ONE IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE! THIS WEDDING IS YOUR **OWN**.

THE CULMINATION OF THE FESTIVITIES IS A SOLEMN CEREMONY OF A KIND KNOWN TO ALL EARTH'S PEOPLES AND CULTURES...

DO YOU, GUNTHER, ACCEPT THIS WOMAN, BRUNNHILDA, AS YOUR WIFE UNDER LAW, TILL DEATH OR DISHONOR DO YOU PART, SO HELP YOU ODIN?

I DO!

BUT HAPLESS BRUNNHILDA, HER MIND STILL BEFOGGED BY THE SHOCK OF HER UNWANTED RESCUE, IS AN UNWILLING AND UNWARY PARTY TO THE PROCEEDINGS...

AND DO YOU, BRUNNHILDA, TAKE THIS MAN, GUNTHER, TO BE YOUR LORD AND MASTER IN ALL THINGS, TILL DEATH DO YOU PART?

G-GUNTHER? THAT'S NOT-- NOT WHO...

LIKE A CURTAIN SUDDENLY DRAWN, THE LIGHT OF **MEMORY** FILLS THE ONCE-VALKYRIE'S MIND...

NO! YOU ARE NOT MY BETROTHED!

IT IS SIEGFRIED!

DEAREST, HOW CAME I HERE? WHAT IS YOUR PART IN THIS MOCKERY OF OUR ETERNAL VOW?

A STUNNED SILENCE SWEEPS THE WEDDING PARTY AND THROUGH THE GREAT HALL...

FINALLY, SIEGFRIED REGAINS HIS TONGUE...

WOMAN, YOUR WITS ARE MUDDLED. I AM NOT YOUR BRIDE-GROOM NOR HAVE I EVER LAID EYES ON YOU WITH MATRIMONIAL INTENT.

SIEGFRIED--? IS THIS SOME--SOME TEST OF MY LOVE?

DESPERATELY SHE SEARCHES THE EYES OF HER BELOVED, TRYING TO DETERMINE IF HE IS AN IMPOSTER...OR WORSE, HER BETRAYER...

YOUR WORDS ARE NONSENSE, WOMAN. HOW COULD I TEST THAT WHICH NEVER WAS?

H-HE *LIES!* HE PLEDGED ME HIS LOVE-- NAY, EVEN SHARED WITH ME HIS MANLY COMPANY FOR A NIGHT!*

ODIN PRESERVE ME! I AM UNDONE! MY WEDDING IS SPOILED!

*BETWEEN LAST ISSUE AND THIS. --JIM.

WHAT CHICANERY IS THIS? GUNTHER, PAY NO HEED TO THIS LYING WENCH!

BY OUR OATH, I NEVER TOUCHED YOUR INTENDED BRIDE!

GUNTHER, LOOK-- THE RING! SIEGFRIED HAS THE RING THAT BRUNNHILDA WORE AS SYMBOL OF HER MAIDEN-HOOD!

BRUNNHILDA-- IS THAT YOUR RING SIEGFRIED WEARS?

YES...BUT IT WAS *YOU* WHO TOOK THE RING FROM ME, GUNTHER, NOT HIM. HOW DID HE GET IT, UNLESS--UNLESS SIEGFRIED TRADED ME FOR GUTRUNA-- WITH THE RING AS PART OF THE DOWRY!

THE RING WAS PART OF NO DEAL! IT SEEMS TO ME THAT SIEGFRIED HAD HIS WAY WITH YOU WHILE DISGUISED AS *ME* LAST NIGHT!

AMIDST THE CONFUSION CAUSED BY GUNTHER'S UNAWARENESS OF SIEGFRIED AND BRUNNHILDA'S PREVIOUS RELATIONSHIP, GUNTHER STRIVES TO SALVAGE SOME DIGNITY FROM THE SHAMBLES OF HIS WEDDING BY SUMMONING HIS MEN...

GUARDS! SLAY THE BASE BETRAYER SIEGFRIED!

HE HAS VIOLATED OUR BLOOD OATH BY DEFILING MY BRIDE!

THIS IS THE STUFF OF MADNESS, GUNTHER. I HAVE NOT BROKEN MY OATH TO YOU!

I'M WARNING YOU BUT ONCE, IF YOUR VASSALS TAKE ANOTHER STEP TOWARD ME--

-- IT SHALL BE THEIR *SKULLS* I BREAK!

STILL MORE OF YOU JACKALS LEAP TO THE AID OF YOUR SENSELESS LIEGE? VERY WELL THEN, MY SWORD *NEEDFUL* WELCOMES ALL OF YOU!

HERE'S WHERE WE REPAY YOU FOR THE DRUBBING YOU GAVE US LAST MORN, SWINE!

I THINK NOT, LOUT-- FOR I AM THE BETTER OF YOU ALL!

AND WHERE I COULD AFFORD TO SHOW MERCY WHEN THERE WAS BUT FOUR OF YOU-- WITH *FORTY* I CANNOT!

LIKE A RAGING STORM, THE RIGHTEOUS SIEGFRIED RENDS HIS WAY THROUGH GUNTHER'S HORDES...

...HIS ENEMIES' SWORDS UNABLE TO TOUCH HIM.

DOES IT MAKE YOUR HEART POUND, THUNDERER, TO SEE YOUR MORTAL SELF CLEAVE THROUGH THE THRONG OF SWORDSMEN, EVEN AS YOU YOURSELF HAVE DONE WITH YOUR HAMMER THROUGH GODS AND GIANTS?

OR DO YOU FEEL QUEASY ABOUT THIS POINTLESS SLAUGHTER SPAWNED BY MISUNDERSTANDING AND TREACHERY-- MADE ALL THE MORE UNFAIR BY THE VALKYRIE'S ENCHANTMENT PROTECTING YOU FROM INJURY?

"I LIKE THIS NOT, EYE."

HE-HE'S ROUTING THEM ALL! HAGEN, DO SOMETHING! STOP THIS SENSELESS CARNAGE!

I FEAR I CANNOT, MILADY. WHAT HOPE HAS ONE AS STUNTED AS I AGAINST ONE WHO CAN FELL ARMIES?

THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE. MY GARRISONS ARE THE RHINELAND'S FINEST-- AND YET THEY FALL LIKE CHAFF BEFORE HIM! SIEGFRIED MUST BE CHARMED!

INDEED, SIR, HE IS IMPERVIOUS TO ALL HARM, PROVIDED HE NEVER TURNS HIS *BACK* TO A FOE!

IN BRUNNHILDA'S DEJECTION AT HER PRESUMED BETRAYAL, SHE HAS LET SLIP THE SOLE WEAKNESS OF HER ERSTWHILE LOVER...

...BUT WHILE NO MAN BATTLING THIS DAY KNOWS SIEGFRIED'S FATAL FLAW, *HAGEN* HAS NOW LEARNED OF IT!

HEAR ME, GUNTHER-- CALL OFF YOUR MEN WHILE YOU STILL HAVE ONE TO SERVE YOU!

I REPEAT TO YOU: I HAVE NOT LIED TO YOU, I HAVE NOT COMPROMISED YOUR LYING BRIDE-TO-BE!

PLEASE, MY BROTHER, HOLD BACK YOUR MEN. IT IS CLEAR THEY CANNOT WIN. THIS SLAUGHTER IS AS MUCH ON *YOUR* HANDS AS SIEGFRIED'S!

YOU STILL PROFESS *LOVE* FOR THIS MAN WHO BROUGHT DISHONOR TO OUR HOUSE...?

DISHONOR, GUNTHER? WAS IT HONORABLE THEN TO USE A MIND-POTION TO TRICK SIEGFRIED INTO WINNING YOUR BRIDE FOR YOU? HE ONLY SWORE THAT OATH AFTER YOU DRUGGED HIM!

IF I DID NOT WANT HIM SO MUCH, I'D ASK YOU TO FREE HIM FROM YOUR MARRIAGE PACT COMPLETELY!

YOU MAY BE RIGHT, MY SISTER. I WILL OFFER SIEGFRIED NEW TERMS...

...LEST WHEN HE HAS CUT DOWN MY MEN HE START TOWARD ME!

GUARDS! CEASE YOUR ATTACK! SIEGFRIED! I WOULD PROPOSE A TRUCE!

SIEGFRIED--I KNOW NOT THE TRUTH BEHIND YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH BRUNNHILDA. THAT IS SOMETHING I MUST YET LEARN.

BUT SINCE MY SISTER STILL WISHES YOU AS HUSBAND, I WISH PEACE BETWEEN US. TAKE MY SISTER, WED HER, AND LEAVE MY KINGDOM!

I ACCEPT YOUR TERMS, GUNTHER-- FOR IT IS THE LADY GUTRUNA THAT IS MY SOLE INTEREST HERE.

COME, MILADY. WE HAVE PREPARATIONS TO MAKE.

I HAVE LOST SIEGFRIED FOREVER! THAT WITCH *GUTRUNA* MUST HAVE BEGUILED HIM TO FORGET OUR LOVE ENTIRELY! A CURSE UPON THEM...!

HEAR THAT, HAGEN? SHE SPEAKS OF SIEGFRIED WITH LONGING AND REGRET. IS HE SO IRRESISTIBLE TO WOMEN, OR CAN THERE HAVE BEEN MORE BETWEEN THEM THAN I KNOW?

IT MATTERS NOT, SIRE...

...A SIP OF MY POTION AND HER HEART AND MIND WILL BELONG SOLELY TO *YOU*.

AS FOR SIEGFRIED-- WHILE HE LIVES HE IS A DANGER TO OUR CLAN. DESPITE YOUR SISTER'S PASSION, SIEGFRIED MUST *DIE*. AND THANKS TO YOUR BRIDE, WE KNOW JUST HOW THAT CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED!

'TWOULD SEEM 'MIDST ALL THIS INTRIGUE, MY MORTAL SELF IS FATED TO COME TO AN IGNOBLE DEMISE.

THAT IS NOT ALL, THUNDER GOD. FOR SIEGFRIED'S DEATH MARKS THE BEGINNING OF ODIN'S GREATEST FAILURE--

--A FAILURE THAT BOTH DIMINISHES THE MIGHT OF ASGARD ITSELF AND FORCES ODIN TO BOW BEFORE THE STAR-SPANNING CELESTIALS!

SHOW ON THEN, *EYE*-- FOR E'EN AS WE SPEAK, THESE CELESTIALS HOLD THE EARTH'S FATE IN THEIR MIGHTY HANDS!

NEXT

THE END OF THE RING SAGA... A RETURN TO ASGARD... AND THE CLIMACTIC CLASH WITH--

THE CELESTIALS!

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SPECIAL 300TH ISSUE!

pollard

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE EPIC CLIMAX OF THE MOST MOMENTOUS ®THOR SAGA OF ALL!

IT BEGAN WHEN **ODIN**, LORD OF ASGARD, PLUCKED OUT HIS RIGHT **EYE** IN EXCHANGE FOR KNOWLEDGE OF THE FUTURE...

PASSING THROUGH THE FIERY **WELL OF WISDOM**, THE EYE GREW TO MONSTROUS PROPORTIONS AND TOOK ON A LIFE OF ITS OWN.

MONTHS LATER, THOR, SON OF ODIN, APPROACHED THE EYE FOR HIS OWN ANSWERS WHEN HE SUSPECTED HIS DIVINE FATHER HAD, IN SOME DISTANT PAST, BETRAYED THE EARTH.

NOW, ON A BARREN WORLD, THE THUNDER GOD LEARNS AS THIS STRANGE ORACLE UNFOLDS THIS VISION OF THOR'S LONG-FORGOTTEN PAST...

AND WHILE THE MIGHTY THOR BROODS, DIMENSIONS DISTANT ON EARTH, A FAR **MIGHTIER** BEING INTIMATELY WOVEN INTO THIS VAST COSMIC TAPESTRY STANDS ATOP TWIN PYLONS NEAR A PERUVIAN TEMPLE. HE IS **ARISHEM** OF THE FOURTH CELESTIAL HOST!

AND WERE THE ODINSON TO KNOW THAT THIS DAY, THE GIANT SPACE-GOD WILL PASS **JUDGMENT** ON THE PLANET EARTH THAT THOR HAS SWORN TO **DEFEND**...HE WOULD ROUSE HIMSELF FROM THE EYE'S RECOLLECTIONS. BUT ALAS, HE **KNOWS NOT.**

CHAPTER ONE

TWILIGHT OF THE GODS!

LF192

THE END OF THE TALE IS NEAR, THUNDER GOD... BEHOLD ONCE MORE YOUR PREVIOUS MORTAL SELF, SIEGFRIED, ON THE BANKS OF THE RIVER RHINE...

IT IS THE DAY AFTER THE BOLD HERO CONTESTED THE NOBLEMAN GUNTHER FOR THE HAND OF HIS SISTER GUTRUNA--A CONTEST THAT ENDED IN AN UNEASY TRUCE...*

*AS SHOWN LAST ISSUE. --JIM.

BUT WHILE HE SEARCHES FOR GAME TO TAKE TO HIS BRIDE-TO-BE, OTHER MAIDENS CAPTURE HIS ATTENTION...

HO, PRETTY SIEGFRIED!

RHINE-MAIDENS!

HAS THE PREY ELUDED THE GREAT HUNTER?

FOR SHAME! WE WILL SHOW YOU WHERE GAME HIDES!

AND WHAT MUST I DO IN RETURN, PRAY TELL?

WE BUT DESIRE ONE THING!

THE GOLDEN RING ON YOUR FINGER!

NO! THIS RING IS FAR TOO PRECIOUS TO BE IDLY TRADED!

FOOLISH SIEGFRIED! DOOM WILL BEFALL ANYONE WHO WEARS THE ACCURSED RING!

ONLY THE WATERS OF THIS RIVER CAN CANCEL THE CURSE!

I FEAR NO CURSE! I AM A DRAGON-SLAYER! WHAT THREAT ARE MERE MOUTH-INGS?

THEN THERE IS NO HOPE FOR YOU! FAREWELL, DOOMED ONE!

FOOLISH WATER-NYMPHS! WHAT COULD POSSIBLY HARM A MIGHTY WARRIOR LIKE MYSELF? ALTHOUGH, IN TRUTH, THEIR WORDS DO RESEMBLE THOSE SPOKEN BY THE DRAGON FROM WHOM I WON THE RING...

AWOOOOO

WHAT--? A HORN SOUNDS.

GUNTHER--AND DWARFISH HAGEN! WHAT DO YOU WANT? I THOUGHT YOU WISHED NE'ER TO LAY EYES ON ME AFTER YESTERDAY'S DISAGREEMENT!

I HAVE COME TO MAKE AMENDS, SIEGFRIED! IT IS UNSEEMLY TO BE AN ENEMY TO MY SISTER'S FUTURE HUSBAND.

YOU HAVE LEARNED THEN, THAT I WAS UNJUSTLY ACCUSED OF COMPROMISING YOUR INTENDED BRIDE?

YES...'TWOULD SEEM 'TWAS ALL A MISUNDERSTANDING. ANYWAY, I NOW KNOW YOU DID NAUGHT TO BREAK YOUR OATH TO ME.

WOULD YOU CARE TO DINE WITH US? I SEE YOU ARE WITHOUT A CATCH.

MY THANKS, GUNTHER. GAME SEEMS TO HAVE AVOIDED ME TODAY AS IF I REEKED OF DEATH!

EVEN THE GREATEST OF HUNTERS HAVE UNLUCKY SPELLS. NO MATTER, HAGEN SHOULD HAVE OUR BIRD ROASTED ERE LONG.

MAY I INTEREST YOU IN SOME ALE WHILE WE WAIT, GOOD SIEGFRIED?

IN TRUTH, FRUSTRATION MAKES ONE THIRSTY. YES--ALE.

ALTHOUGH MY HALF-BROTHER GUNTHER HAS GONE BACK ON OUR PLAN TO SLAY SIEGFRIED THIS DAY, *I* HAVE NOT! MY FATHER ALBERICH CRAFTED THE RHINEGOLD RING TO GIVE HIM POWER OVER THE GODS THEMSELVES. AND WHEN IT WAS STOLEN...

...HE PLACED A CURSE UPON IT. NOW IT MUST BE MINE!

SIEGFRIED--LOOK! TWO EBON BIRDS FLY FROM THE BRUSH--*RAVENS*, 'TWOULD APPEAR! THEY CAW AS IF THEY WOULD SPEAK!

AYE, ONCE. BUT NOW, I FEAR, I AM OUT OF TUNE WITH NATURE. I HEAR NOTHING BUT CROWING.

DID *YOU* NOT ONCE CLAIM TO UNDERSTAND THE LANGUAGE OF BIRDS?

IN A MOMENT OF DESPAIR, THE MAIDEN BRUNNHILDA REVEALED THAT THIS STRUTTING FOOL WAS INVULNERABLE--EXCEPT FOR HIS *BACK* WHICH NOW IS TURNED TOWARDS ME!

THEY TURN--TO FLY AWAY.

IT MUST BE AN OMEN OF SOME SORT--!

DIE, SIEGFRIED! IN THE NAME OF MY FATHER, YOU SHALL PERISH FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!

ARRRRGK!

HAGEN! WE-WE AGREED NOT TO--!

I...AM BETRAYED...BY A *DWARF*!?! THE MAIDENS WERE RIGHT--THIS RING IS CURSSSSSSS!

BREAKING THE SPEAR HAFT THAT IMPALES HIM, SIEGFRIED LUNGES FOR HIS MURDERER, ONLY TO DIE IN THE STRIVING...! HE COLLAPSES TO THE MOIST EARTH--SOAKING IT WITH HIS BLOOD.

YOU SLEW HIM! WAS IT NOT ENOUGH THAT WE TRICKED HIM INTO GIVING UP HIS TRUE LOVE BRUNNHILDA TO ME--?

DID WE ALSO HAVE TO CHEAT HIM OF HIS VERY LIFE? WHY?

MY REASONS ARE MY OWN, DEAR BROTHER... NOT FOR THE SPEAKING.

FAREWELL, HERO, THOUGH YOU DIED IGNOBLY, I SHALL SEE YOU RECEIVE A VIKING'S FUNERAL!

FORBIDDING HIS HALF-BROTHER TO GO NEAR SIEGFRIED'S FALLEN FORM, GUNTHER HOISTS THE HERO ONTO HIS STEED AND LEADS HIM BACK TO THE CASTLE...

...HE THEN TRAVELS ON AHEAD TO BREAK THE NEWS TO HIS SISTER.

DEAR GUTRUNA, YOUR BELOVED...IS DEAD, SLAIN BY A WILD BEAST.

A BEAST NAMED HAGEN!

BUT AS ALL YOU PRESENT ARE MY WITNESS, I SHALL NOT LET SO BASE AN ACT GO UNAVENGED!

I HEREBY SEVER THE BLOODLINE BETWEEN US, GNOME-- BY YOUR DEATH!

ON THE CONTRARY, SQUEAMISH OAF-- BY YOURS!

ULK.

G-GUNTHER? NO! NOT A HUSBAND AND A BROTHER LOST IN ONE DAY!

GUARDS! SEIZE THE LITTLE MURDERER!

NO, THEY WON'T! ONCE I HAVE THE RHINEGOLD, YOU WILL ALL BE IN MY POWER!

BUT AS THE DWARF REACHES FOR THE RING, SIEGFRIED'S LIFELESS FIST CLENCHES ABOUT IT DEFIANTLY...

IT WILL TAKE MORE THAN A DWARF TO WIN IT THIS DAY.

AND AS THE LATE LORD'S VASSALS OVERPOWER THE SQUEALING HAGEN, ODIN'S ERSTWHILE VALKYRIE BRUNNHILDA ENTERS...

NO--NO! PLEASE--I MUST HAVE THE RING. I DESERVE IT.

SIEGFRIED--?

DEAD! STABBED IN THE BACK--FOR I LET IT BE KNOWN THIS WAS HIS ONE FATAL FLAW. HIS DEATH IS AS MUCH MY DOING AS THE DWARF'S!

O SIEGFRIED--IT WAS NOT MEANT TO END THIS WAY. OUR LOVE WAS TO ENDURE... OUR LIVES TO ENDEAVOR. BUT NOW, THROUGH INSIDIOUS ACTS BEYOND OUR TAMING, THE DREAM IS LOST. THERE IS BUT ONE RECOURSE...

GUARDS! LET GREAT OAKEN LOGS BE CARRIED TO THE BANK OF THE RHINE AND SET AFIRE.

THIS HERO'S BODY MUST BE CONSECRATED IN A BLAZING FUNERAL PYRE!

SIEGFRIED--I COME!

ODIN TAKE US!

ANO SO...

HO, MY FAITHFUL STEED--SEEK YOUR FORMER MASTER!

WE WERE TO BE WED, MY DARLING. NOW OUR DOWRY IS BUT DEATH. LET THE FLAMES IN WHICH YOU FOUND ME DELIVER US,

LET US ALL BECOME AS ONE IN THE GOLDEN HALLS OF VALHALLA!

...SO ENDS YOUR PREVIOUS MORTAL INCARNATION...A VICTIM OF BASE TREACHERY.

THEN I *FAILED* AT ODIN'S VERY PURPOSE FOR GRANTING ME HUMAN FORM! I FAILED TO DELIVER THE RHINE-GOLD RING UNTO ODIN... THE RING HE WAS BY *OATH* UNABLE TO ACQUIRE HIMSELF!

TRUE, THOUGH YOU NEVER KNEW THAT WAS YOUR DESTINY!

BUT WHAT OF *ODIN?* HOW DID HE GREET THESE GRIM TIDINGS? AND HOW IS IT I LIVE ON?

SEE FOR YOURSELF, ODINSON... IN HIS CASTLE IN ASGARD, THE BROODING ALL-FATHER WAITS IN SOLITUDE...

HIS RAVENS, **HUGIN** AND **MUNIN**, ALIGHT ON HIS STOOPED SHOULDERS AND RELATE WHAT THEY HAVE WITNESSED...

I AM UNDONE... BY A *DWARF!*

ALL MY EFFORTS TO FREE THE GODS OF THE *NIBELUNG CURSE* THAT I, MYSELF, HAVE BROUGHT UPON US--HAVE MET IN DISMAL *DEFEAT.*

HOPE IS FLED. IN MY ARROGANCE, I HAVE BROUGHT UPON US THE *TWILIGHT OF THE GODS!* AND ALL BECAUSE LONG AGO, I COVETED THE GLEAMING *RHINE-GOLD*, FEARING ITS POWER OVER GODS AND MEN!

PASSING TO HIS PALACE WINDOW, THE LORD OF ASGARD LIFTS HIS TROUBLED EYES TO AWAIT THE ARRIVAL OF THE FLAMES FROM THE FUNERAL PYRE BELOW...

HE SPIES IT... ARCING ACROSS THE SKY-- A SENTIENT FIREBALL.

THE SPHERE OF FLAMES DRAWS CLOSER, EVER CLOSER, FINALLY BURSTING UPON HIS BALCONY. STEPPING FORTH, ARE TWO OF ODIN'S **VALKYRIES**, BEARING THE LIFELESS FORMS OF **BRUNNHILDA** AND **SIEGFRIED!**

WORDLESSLY, THE SHIELD-MAIDENS OFFER THE BODIES TO THEIR LORD.

GO NOW, *VALTRAUTA, GRIMGERDA*... LEAVE A FATHER TO HIS SORROW AND HIS SHAME. THOU SHALT REMEMBER *NOTHING* OF WHAT TRANSPIRED THIS DARK DAY!

YES, LORD ODIN.

AND NOW, MY BLOODSON AND GOD-DAUGHTER, BECAUSE THOU BOTH ART DEARER TO ME THAN MY *OWN LIFE*--I GRANT IT UNTO THEE.

THOU SHALT *LIVE*-- E'EN IF ODIN MUST *DIE!*

WITH ALL HIS IMMORTAL HEART AND SOUL, THE ALL-FATHER CHANNELS HIS **ODINFORCE** INTO THE HOVERING BODIES BEFORE HIM, TRYING TO REKINDLE THE DIVINE SPARK WITHIN THEM.

FINALLY, HE STOPS, SWOONING FROM THE EXERTION, LIGHT-HEADED, FEVERISH...

...BUT WHEN NEXT HIS SWEAT-LADEN EYELIDS OPEN HE SEES **THOR** AND THE **VALKYRIE**-- ALIVE AGAIN!

AND AT HIS FEET THERE LIES THE ACCURSED **RHINE-GOLD**, LIKEWISE RESTORED TO ITS TRUE FORM.

YOU *LIVE*, MY CHILDREN. WOULD THAT MY HEART COULD REJOICE...

NOW, I SHALL SEND THEE FROM HERE... NE'ER AGAIN TO THINK UPON ANYTHING THAT HAPPENED IN YOUR MORTAL GUISES! THE KNOWLEDGE OF ODIN'S FOLLY MUST BE HIS ALONE.

IT IS TIME FOR THE FATHER TO ATONE FOR HIS SINS OF AVARICE AND PRIDE.

THEN, STRIPPING OFF HIS GODLY RAIMENT, HE STAGGERS DOWN HIS PRIVATE PATH TO **YGGDRASIL**... THE WORLD ASH... THE TREE OF LIFE... THE COSMIC AXIS!

SLOWLY, DE-LIBERATELY, ODIN REACHES FOR THE **RING OF POWER**, RESIGNED AT LAST TO TAKE THE CURSE UPON HIMSELF, AS HE KNEW IN HIS HEART OF HEARTS, HE ONE DAY WOULD.

MUSTERING A VESTIGE OF HIS DWINDLING STRENGTH, HE SNAPS THE RHINEGOLD CIRCLET IN HALF...

IT IS **HERE** HE WILL SEEK **PENANCE**-- STRUGGLE TO EXPIATE HIS OVERWHELMING **GUILT**, THROUGH SUCH **SUFFERING** AS EVEN AN IMMORTAL MIGHT NOT BEAR... AND SHARE HIS TERRIBLE BURDEN WITH NONE.

PRESSING THE COLD TIP OF HIS SACRED SPEAR GUNGNIR TO HIS NAKED ABDOMEN--

--ODIN THROWS HIMSELF AGAINST IT, PIERCING HIS IMPERIAL FLESH--IMPALING HIMSELF.

THE WOUND, NOT UNLIKE THAT RECENTLY INCURRED BY HIS MORTAL SON, WILL HASTEN HIS END.

THEN, HUGIN AND MUNIN TAKE HIS WRISTS IN THEIR POWERFUL CLAWS, BEARING HIM ALOFT--

--AND NAIL HIM BY THE RHINEGOLD RING-HALVES TO A BRANCH OF YGGDRASIL!

NOW, MY FAITHFUL RAVENS, THOU SHALT SIT ON MY SHOULDERS NEVERMORE! GET THEE GONE, AND TAKE GUNGNIR FROM MY SIGHT AS WELL. PERHAPS THOU SHALT FIND ONE WORTHIER TO WIELD THE SPEAR OF HEAVEN! FAREWELL...!

AT THEIR LORD'S COMMAND, THE RAVENS TAKE FLIGHT, LEAVING ODIN TO HIS SELF-DETERMINED FATE. ODIN HANGS...PINIONED BY A POWER GREATER THAN HIS OWN... HIS REMAINING STRENGTH OOZING FROM HIM IN RIVULETS OF RED, NOURISHING THE COSMIC TREE.

IN HIS INEFFABLE AGONY, ODIN PRAYS...PRAYS TO THE ELDER GODS WHO SPAWNED HIM...THAT HIS SACRIFICE WILL BE ENOUGH TO STAVE OFF THE FINAL DAY OF RECKONING FOR THE GODS...THE DAY OF RAGNAROK!

DESPITE THE AGONY OF HIS CRUCIFIXION--

--ODIN'S THOUGHTS TURN TO YOU, HIS BELOVED SON...

...WHERE IN THE DEPTHS OF HIS DELIRIUM, HE VIEWS YOUR TIME-LOST CLASH WITH HERCULES, PRINCE OF FAR-OFF OLYMPUS.

"THOU HAST NEVER BEEN ONE TO AVOID TROUBLE," THINKS ODIN. BUT THEN AGAIN, NEITHER HAS HE.

ODIN MY DEAR--CAN YOU STILL RECOGNIZE... ME?

OVER THE LONG, PAINFUL DAYS THAT FOLLOW, ODIN DWELLS ON ALL THOSE HE HAS EVER LOVED, SILENTLY BIDDING THEM FAREWELL. THEN, ON THE NINTH DAY, WHEN THE ALL-FATHER HAS BECOME TOO WEAK TO DO EVEN THAT, HE IS APPROACHED BY AN EMERALD-CLOAKED WOMAN.

I HAVE WATCHED WITH SADNESS THIS SORRY STATE OF AFFAIRS YOUR EGO HAS BROUGHT UPON YOU. I APPRECIATE YOUR ATTEMPT AT REDEMPTION THROUGH SELF-SACRIFICE.

BUT I BID YOU *RECONSIDER* YOUR PLAN TO HANG GROTESQUELY TILL YOUR *DEATH-GODDESS* CLAIMS YOU.

OBSERVE, IF YOU WILL, THE *SHADOW* THAT PASSES OVERHEAD!

SLOWLY, TORTUOUSLY, THE DYING SKY-GOD LIFTS HIS HEAD TO THE HEAVENS TO BEHOLD A **SHIP** OF SOME SORT, PASSING BETWEEN THE **SUN** AND THE **EARTH**...

A GARGANTUAN VESSEL IT IS, WHOSE SIZE SEEMS THAT OF THE MOON ITSELF, AND WHOSE PURPOSE IS AS IMPONDERABLE AS DEATH!

HE HAS NOT UTTERED A SINGLE WORD IN THE NINE DAYS AND NIGHTS HE HAS HUNG, BUT NOW THROUGH SUN-PARCHED LIPS, ODIN SPEAKS...

HOLD, VERDANT ONE--WHAT IS THE MEANING OF YON STAR-CRAFT?

IF YOU WOULD KNOW OF IT, MY LOVE--YOU WILL HAVE TO *SAVE YOURSELF.*

SHE SLIPS BACK INTO THE BILLOWING MIST THAT BROUGHT HER, LEAVING THE SPLAYED FIGURE TO CONSIDER HER WORDS.

SUDDENLY FILLED WITH VITALITY AND A NEW SENSE OF **PURPOSE**, BEYOND ANY HE HAS EVER KNOWN, THE ALL-FATHER SUMMONS EVERY VESTIGE OF HIS ALMOST-DEPLETED **MIGHT**...

--AND WRENCHES HIMSELF **FREE** OF THE RHINEGOLD RESTRAINTS. HIS ATONEMENT HAS ENDED.

HE FALLS FROM YGGDRASIL LIKE A BROKEN TWIG, THE RING-HALVES DROPPING BESIDE HIM.

DUMPF

NUMBLY, THE LORD OF ASGARD LAY CHOKING IN THE DIRT, TOO WEAK TO STIR, GATHERING **STRENGTH** FROM WITHOUT, UNTIL HE IS ABLE TO RISE.

THEN, TUCKING THE RING FRAGMENTS INTO HIS BREACH, HE STAGGERS BACK TO THE **GLEAMING CITY** HE HAD FORSAKEN.

ARRIVING UNNOTICED IN HIS PALACE, HE SEEKS COUNCIL WITH **MIMIR**, THE ALL-KNOWING WELL OF FIRE...

AH, ODIN--YOU ARE LOOKING WELL THIS DAY.

SPARE ME YOUR WIT, INFERNAL FLAME. I HAVE LITTLE APPETITE FOR IT.

I HAVE SEEN THE APPROACH OF AN ENORMOUS *SKY-CRAFT*, ALIEN IN FORM, UNKNOWN IN PURPOSE. I WOULD KNOW OF ITS SIGNIFICANCE.

WERE I TO TELL THEE WHAT I KNEW OF IT, 'TWOULD BUT *TORMENT* THEE. SPARE THYSELF FURTHER TORTURE, ODIN.

TELL ME, MIMIR--OR I SHALL SMITE THEE WITH MY SACRED SPEAR!

THY RAVENS HAVE *HID* GUNGNIR--I FEAR IT NOT. YET, I *WILL* TELL THEE...

THE CRAFT HOLDS BEINGS FROM BEYOND ALL *KNOWN SPACE*, WHO FIRST VISITED MIDGARD LONG BEFORE OUR RACE CAME TO BE. THEY COME TO *JUDGE* THE WORTH OF A WORLD.

ALIENS--WOULD PRESUME TO JUDGE THE SPHERE THAT SPAWNED BOTH *GODS* AND *MEN*?!?

NEVER--NOT WHILE BREATH REMAINS WITHIN ME!

FOR A DAY, LORD ODIN DWELLS UPON MIMIR'S WORDS, RECOUPING HIS LOST STRENGTH. THEN HIS DOUR MEDITATIONS ARE INTERRUPTED BY A CERTAIN IMPERTINENT SON...

HAIL, NOBLE SIRE!

FATHER, I HAVE MET AN IMMORTAL *NOT OF ASGARD* WHO DID TELL ME OF A *SECOND* REALM FILLED WITH OTHERS OF HIS ILK!

WE HAVE AGREED TO A *MATCH*-- HIS *OLYMPUS* 'GAINST ASGARD!

BY WHAT RIGHT DIDST THOU COMMIT SUCH AN ACT?

YOU DID NOT NOTICE YOUR FATHER'S FARAWAY COUNTENANCE AND WAN COMPLEXION AS HE BADE--

THERE SHALL BE NO BATTLE!

BUT THANKS TO **LOKI**, GOD OF EVIL, YOU SOON FIND YOURSELF PITTED AGAINST THE SCIONS OF OLYMPUS ON A TIMELESS PLAIN...*

*AS SHOWN IN **THOR ANNUAL** #5, 1976. -- JIM.

AND WHILE THE BATTLE RAGES, YOUR SIRE STEPS THROUGH THE MISTS OF TIME TO MEET WITH **ZEUS**, LORD OF OLYMPUS...

THE TWO SKY-FATHERS FACE ONE ANOTHER, EXCHANGING WORLDS OF MEANING IN A SINGLE GLANCE...

...THEN THEY **PART**.

LATER, AT GODWAR'S END, YOU SEEK AUDIENCE WITH YOUR FATHER AGAIN, TO LEARN WHY, DESPITE YOUR SEEMING **VICTORY**, NAUGHT WAS GAINED BY CONQUEST...

...I DIDST MEET WITH ZEUS HIMSELF DURING THY WAR. 'TWAS AGREED THERE WAS A LESSON BOTH OUR LANDS NEED LEARN...

MEN BELIEVE IN GODS-- THEIR *OWN* GODS. 'TWAS EVER THUS. GREECE CANNOT BE "WON" BY SUCH AS US. IT DOTH EXIST FOR THE *OLYMPIANS*.

BUT YOU WOULD HAVE NONE OF YOUR FATHER'S WORDS. YOU STALKED AWAY TO SEEK OUT NEWER LANDS TO CONQUER...

HAD YOU BUT TAKEN NOTICE OF THE GOLDEN **PLAYING PIECES** UPON ODIN'S GAMES-TABLE, YOU MIGHT HAVE HAD A NOTION OF THE ALL-FATHER'S TRUE PREOCCUPATIONS...

CHAPTER 2

WHATEVER GODS THERE BE...

MARK GRUENWALD-RALPH MACCHIO KEITH POLLARD-GENE DAY
STORY ART
JOE ROSEN CARL GAFFORD JIM SALICRUP JIM SHOOTER
LETTERS COLORS EDITOR EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

THE PLAYING PIECES BEAR THE LIKENESSES OF *FOREIGNERS*... ONLY LORD *ZEUS* IS FAMILIAR TO ME. WHO MIGHT THESE FIGURES BE?

WHAT GODS ARE THESE?

BEHOLD, ODINSON-- AND SEE FOR YOURSELF WHAT BEINGS THE CHESSMEN REPRESENT...

YOU SEE GATHERED TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME THIS AUSPICIOUS DAY A MILLENNIUM AGO, ODIN'S ***COUNTERPARTS***-- THE NUMEROUS ***CHIEF GODS*** OF EARTH-- THE GOD-HEADS OF THE ***OTHER*** MIGHTY PANTHEONS-- ***SKY-FATHERS ALL!***

FOR WHEN ODIN AND ZEUS HAD MET, THEY MADE PLANS TO ASSEMBLE A ***COUNCIL OF GOD-HEADS***, TO DECIDE WHAT ACTION TO TAKE AGAINST THE THREATENING STAR-BEINGS. THEY DISPATCHED THEIR MESSENGERS THROUGHOUT THE MYRIAD MYTH-REALMS TO SUMMON THE EXALTED GOD-FATHERS OF ALL EARTH'S LEGENDS.

AND THERE IN THE CLOUDS 'ROUND THE ***CELESTIAL AXIS*** ADJACENT TO EACH OF THEIR REALMS, THE MIGHTIEST ASSEMBLAGE OF MORTAL-WORSHIPPED DEITIES CONVENES...

I SEE OUR SUMMONS WAS WELL RECEIVED, ZEUS. ARE ALL OUR BRETHREN PRESENT?

THOU ART THE *LAST* TO ARRIVE, ASGARDIAN.

THEN LET US *BEGIN*.

MY FELLOW SKY-LORDS, THE VERY *SPHERE* WHICH HAS BORNE US IS IN *GRAVE DANGER* FROM ENIGMATIC INVADERS FROM BEYOND. WE MUST ACT IN *CONJUNCTION* TO PRESERVE THAT PRECIOUS ORB WHICH IS BOTH OUR SPIRITUAL SUSTENANCE AND OUR DOMINION.

THERE HAVE BEEN *OTHER* CELESTIAL VISITATIONS. EXTRA-TERRESTRIALS HAVE ABOUNDED ON OUR WORLD. WHY IS *THIS* ONE SO DIRE?

THE ALIENS HAVE SERVITORS-- STRANGE HUMANS MASQUERADING AS MY INCA BROTHERS-- WHO HAVE BUILT A *TEMPLE* IN MY DOMAIN. I HAVE OBSERVED THEM AND SO LEARNED--

--THEIR CELESTIAL MASTERS INTEND TO *JUDGE* MANKIND-- AND IF THEY DEEM IT UNWORTHY, *DESTROY* IT.

AND WERE MANKIND TO PERISH, SO WOULD *WE*, ITS GODS-- FOR OUR DESTINIES, AS WE DOTH KNOW, ARE INTERTWINED IN WAYS E'EN BEYOND THE POWERS OF ORACLES TO UNRAVEL.

HENCE, I PROPOSE WE TAKE ACTION.

AYE, ACTION. THOUGH CONTENT THESE CENTURIES PAST TO ALLOW MY WORSHIP ON EARTH TO DWINDLE, STILL DO I CARE FOR THOSE SHORT-LIVED BEINGS WHO WALK THE MORTAL PLANE.

WHAT WOULD YOU SUGGEST WE DO, ODIN?

I PROPOSE WE CHOOSE AMONGST OURSELVES A DELEGATION-- TO MEET WITH THE SPACE-CREATURES 'PON THEIR ARRIVAL.

WE WILL MAKE KNOWN TO THEM, THROUGH FORCIBLE MEANS IF NECESSARY, THAT NO OFFWORLDERS SHALL USURP OUR COMMON DOMAIN ELSE THEY INVOKE THE WRATH OF ALL THE GODS OF EARTH! WHAT SAY YE?

THE RESPONSE IS A THUNDEROUS CHORUS OF ***AYES***, WHOSE DEAFENING REVERBERATIONS ECHO THROUGHOUT THE HALLS OF ETERNITY.

I AM ASTOUNDED THERE BE SO MANY GODS--SO MANY PANTHEONS I NE'ER KNEW EXISTED!

WHY HAST ODIN NE'ER SPOKEN OF THEM?

KNOWING OF HIS PEOPLE'S WARLIKE NATURE, IT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN WISE, ODINSON...

WHILE YOUR FATHER CONVENED WITH HIS PEERS, YOU WENT TO EARTH, SEARCHING FOR NEW LANDS TO CONQUER. THIS BROUGHT YOU INTO CONTACT WITH THE CELESTIALS' EARTH AGENTS, THE ETERNALS,* WITH WHOM YOU SHARED MANY ADVENTURES.

*THOR ANNUAL #7, 1978. --JIM.

THEN, YOU LEFT FOR ASGARD WITH THE MEMORY OF ALL THAT OCCURRED TO YOU IN PERU CLEANSED BY THE EVER-CAUTIOUS ETERNALS.

AND AS YOU LEFT, OBLIVIOUS OF YOUR STAY WITH THE ETERNALS, THE CELESTIALS' MONSTROUS MOTHERSHIP SILENTLY DESCENDS TO THE PLANET'S SURFACE.

YOUR DEPARTURE MEANS NOTHING TO THE STAR-SPANNING CELESTIALS, WHO STEP FROM THEIR VESSEL THROUGH SCREENS OF IMMENSE ENERGY.

THEY STRIDE THE WORLD IMPERIOUSLY, SEEMINGLY UNAWARE OF THEIR AWE-STRUCK SERVITORS... YET NOT THE SLIGHTEST THOUGHT OF A SINGLE ETERNAL SLIPS PAST CELESTIAL PERCEPTIONS,

WORDLESSLY, THEIR LEADER ARISHEM DIRECTS HIS FELLOWS TO THEIR APPOINTED TASKS. THE PURPOSE OF THE THIRD HOST IS **CULTIVATION AND INSPECTION**... AND EACH OF THE TEN CELESTIALS IN THE EXPEDITION HAS HIS OWN SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY.

HIS ORDERS GIVEN, ARISHEM MOUNTS THE CEREMONIAL PYLONS. HIS PURPOSE, SIMPLY TO MONITOR AND OBSERVE.

NO SOONER HAS THE HOST-LEADER ASSUMED HIS POSITION THAN HIS HUGE ARMORED HEAD LIFTS SLIGHTLY, TO SEE A SUDDEN, UNNATURAL MASSING OF STORM CLOUDS ABOVE.

THE THUNDERHEADS PART AS A SURGING CHARIOT DRAWN BY ODIN'S EIGHT-LEGGED STEED, AND CARRYING THE ENVOYS OF THE GODS--VISHNU, ODIN AND ZEUS--DESCENDS TO THE PERUVIAN PLAIN.

BOLDLY THEY TOUCH DOWN UPON THE HOT SAND--DWARFED BY THE TWO THOUSAND FOOT TITAN.

THEY DISMOUNT...

HEAR US, TOWERING ONE...WE THREE REPRESENT ALL THE GODS OF EARTH! WE BEAR THEE THIS MESSAGE:

OUR KIND STANDS UNITED IN ITS ***DEFIANCE*** OF YOUR DESIGNS ON OUR WORLD!

MOMENTS PASS AND THE GIANT REMAINS SILENT, OFFERING NO RESPONSE TO ODIN'S STRIDENT PROCLAMATION...AND THEN...

HOLD, IMMORTALS!

'TIS ONE OF THEIR LACKEYS--EMERGING FROM YON TEMPLE.

'TWOULD APPEAR THE CELESTIALS DEIGN NOT TO SPEAK WITH US DIRECTLY!

I BID YOU PEACE, GODS OF EARTH. I AM ***AJAK*** OF THE RACE OF MEN CALLED ***ETERNALS.*** I SHALL INTERCEDE BETWEEN YOU AND MY MAMMOTH MASTERS.

WE ARE EARTH'S NATIVE GODS, BIRTHED IN THE VERY BIOSPHERE OF THIS WORLD. WE WOULD KNOW OF THY ALIEN MASTERS' PURPOSE--AND IF IT DISPLEASES US, WE ARE HERE TO THWART IT!

I AM AFRAID THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE. THESE "ALIENS" AS YOU CALL THEM HAVE A RIGHT TO CARRY OUT THEIR MISSION ON EARTH--

--FOR IT WAS THEY WHO EONS AGO SHAPED MANKIND'S GENETIC DESTINY--BEFORE ANY OF YOU HAD COME INTO BEING.

THEY HAVE RETURNED TO CULTIVATE THE SEEDS SOWED MILLENNIA PAST--AND I WOULD ADVISE AGAINST YOUR ***INTERFERENCE.***

THOU DO TAUNT US, ETERNAL! AWAY!

ODIN--VISHNU--COME...THE TIME FOR TALK IS PAST!

AYE! DIRECT THY ENERGIES THROUGH MY SWORD!

THE WRATH OF THE GODS IS CARRIED IN A SINGLE SEARING **BOLT** THAT STRIKES WITH POWER ENOUGH TO SEND A WORLD REELING FROM ITS ORBIT.

ARISHEM STANDS IMPASSIVELY... UNMOVING...UNAFFECTED.

WHEN THE FUTILE BOMBARDMENT CEASES, THE MIGHTIEST OF THE CELESTIALS TURNS FROM THE ANGRY, IMMORTAL GNATS AT HIS FEET AND UNLEASHES HIS **OWN** IMMEASURABLY MORE POTENT ENERGY THROUGH A DIMENSIONAL RIFT.

THE THREE GODS PALE AS ONE.

FOR IN THEIR MINDS' EYES, THEY BEHOLD THE GATEWAYS TO THEIR HOMES--**ASGARD**, **NIRVANA**, AND **OLYMPUS**--CONSUMED BY A CELESTIAL-CREATED CONFLAGRATION.

BUT INSTANTS BEFORE 'RREPARABLE DAMAGE IS DONE, ARISHEM'S ONSLAUGHT ENDS, AND HIS HEAD LOWERS.

ALMIGHTY ARISHEM COULD HAVE ***DESTROYED*** THE PASSAGES BETWEEN THIS SPHERE AND YOUR GOD-REALMS, CUTTING OFF ALL GODS FROM EARTH FOREVER!

AND THIS HE WILL DO--***UNLESS*** YOU THREE SWEAR ON BEHALF OF ALL YOUR KIND NOT TO INTERFERE IN CELESTIAL AFFAIRS FOR THE NEXT ***MILLENNIUM***.

THE THREE REPRESENTATIVES EXCHANGE SOLEMN GLANCES OF DEFEAT. THE GIANT SEEMS BEYOND CHALLENGE... HIS TERMS BEYOND QUESTIONING.

AND SO, THE THREE GODS OF EARTH **BOW DOWN** BEFORE ARISHEM OF THE THIRD HOST, PLEDGING THAT NONE OF THEIR KIND WILL IMPEDE THE CELESTIALS' PROGRESS FOR THE COMING MILLENNIUM!

AND THE BITTER VOW THEY MAKE THIS SUMMER'S DAY A THOUSAND YEARS AGONE BINDS ALL THE **OTHER** GODS OF EARTH, AS WELL.

THEN ODIN DID NOT *BETRAY* THE EARTH BY BENDING HIS KNEE TO THE CELESTIALS AS IT ONCE DID SEEM... HE SOUGHT ONLY TO *SAVE* IT THROUGH DELAY.

YES, FOR HE KNEW THAT IF THE GODS FOUGHT THE CELESTIALS THAT DAY, IT MIGHT HAVE MEANT THE END OF THEIR KIND... BUT AFTER A THOUSAND YEARS IN WHICH TO MAKE PREPARATIONS, THE ODDS MAY TIP TOWARDS EARTH'S PANTHEONS.

RETURNING TO ASGARD, ODIN BIDS THE GREATEST CRAFTSMEN OF HIS REALM TO FORGE FOR HIM AN UNEQUALED **SUIT OF ARMS**, NOT UNLIKE THAT WORN BY THE CELESTIALS...

UPON ITS COMPLETION, ODIN TAKES THE ARMOR TO HIS FELLOW SKY-LORDS, EACH OF WHOM BESTOWS ON IT A FRACTION OF THEIR GODLY MIGHT... MAKING IT VIRTUALLY ALL-POWERFUL.

WHEN THE CELESTIALS RETURN, THE GODS WILL HAVE A CHAMPION TO BATTLE FOR THEM--AN INVINCIBLE GIANT-SLAYER KNOWN AS... **THE DESTROYER!**

BY THE HORN OF HEIMDALL! THEN THE *CELESTIALS* ARE THE DREAD FUTURE MENACE THAT ODIN CONSTRUCTED THE DESTROYER TO COMBAT! SINCE FIRST I BEHELD THE ARMOR,* I PONDERED ITS TRUE PURPOSE!

WHEN THE THIRD HOST HAD FINISHED THEIR SURVEY AND LEFT, ODIN DISPATCHED THE DESTROYER TO EARTH, SEQUESTERING IT IN A SPECIAL **TEMPLE** OF HIS OWN CONSTRUCTION. THERE IN THE LAND CALLED VIETNAM, IT WOULD AWAIT ITS SUMMONS.

THOR 118,--JIM.

THEN LORD ODIN RETURNS TO HIS PALACE IN ASGARD, WHERE HE SEARCHES FOR A SPECIAL, SPACIOUS CHAMBER IN WHICH TO UNDERTAKE THE LAST OF HIS IMPORTANT TASKS FOR THE MILLENNIUM.

IN HIS GAUNTLETED HANDS IS THE MYSTICAL **POWER SCEPTER**, FASHIONED BY ODIN'S CHIEF WIZARD FOR THE PURPOSE OF CHANNELING THE ALL-FATHER'S MIGHT....

...AND THE DREAD RHINEGOLD RING-HALVES!

PLACING THEM BEFORE HIM, ODIN LOOSES A MAGICAL RAY OF TRANSMUTATION, AND WITH A BURST OF BRILLIANCE, HE UNLOCK'S THE RING'S VERY ESSENCE.

THE REGAL ONE STEPS BACK, SHUTTING HIS AGED EYES AGAINST THE GLARE AS THE SHIMMERING RHINEGOLD ASSUMES NEW FORM... NEW DIMENSIONS--ACCORDING TO HIS WILL.

AND WHEN THE ALL-FATHER AGAIN LOOKS, THE CHANGE IS COMPLETE. THE RHINEGOLD HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO A HUGE, MAGNIFICENT SWORD, WHICH AS ODIN DECREES, WILL HENCEFORTH BE KNOWN AS THE AWESOME **OVERSWORD OF ASGARD!**

THE REALM ETERNAL IS NOW SAFE FROM THE RING'S COSMIC CURSE, SO LONG AS THE SWORD REMAINS WITHIN ITS PROTECTIVE **SHEATH** ONLY ONE AS POWERFUL AS ODIN, WHO CAN PURGE HIMSELF OF THE CURSE THROUGH THE RITE OF SELF-SACRIFICE, CAN WIELD SUCH STAGGERING POWER WITHOUT RENDING THE FABRIC OF INFINITY.

AND ODIN WILL SEE TO IT THAT EVERY ASGARDIAN KNOWS OF THE ODINSWORD'S POWER--THAT WHOSOEVER DRAWS IT FROM ITS SCABBARD WILL BRING THE NIBELUNG CURSE UPON HIMSELF, CAUSING THE VERY HEAVENS TO TREMBLE 'ROUND HIM.

A MILLENNIUM FROM NOW, WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES PERMIT, PERHAPS HE WILL BE ABLE TO BEQUEATH THE CURSE OF THE ODINSWORD--TO THE **CELESTIALS!**

THUS ENDS THE TALE, ODINSON, A MILLENNIUM AGONE. NOW YOU KNOW THE AWESOME TRUTH BEHIND YOUR FATHER'S LUST FOR THE RHINEGOLD AND THE PRICE HE PAID FOR IT-- YOU KNOW OF YOUR PREVIOUS HUMAN INCARNATIONS AND HOW THEY PERISHED-- AND YOU KNOW THE NATURE OF ODIN'S PACT WITH THE STAR-SPANNING CELESTIALS!

AYE, THOU HAST SHOWN ME MUCH.

ENOW TO KNOW THAT I HAVE BEEN A *FOOL* FOR E'ER ACCUSING ODIN OF BETRAYING EARTH IN THE PAST.

NO, WAIT-- THUNDERER! I DO NOT WISH--!

'TIS TIME I MADE *AMENDS*. COME!

HIS WHIRLING MALLET SPINS MADLY, OPENING A DIMENSIONAL VORTEX...

THOR BOUNDS THROUGH IT, CARRYING THE STARTLED **EYE OF ODIN**. AS IT IS PULLED FURTHER FROM ITS OWN LIFE-GIVING DOMAIN, THE EYE **SHRINKS** TO ITS ORIGINAL PROPORTIONS!

THOU SHALT RETURN WITH ME, EYE. MAYHAP I NEED THY COUNSEL FOR WHAT MAY LIE AHEAD.

THE THUNDER GOD'S MIGHTY HAMMER **MJOLNIR** DRAWS HIM UNERRINGLY THROUGH THE VOID UNTIL HE GLIMPSES THE SPIRES OF THE REALM ETERNAL...

ASGARD... 'TIS GOOD TO BE *HOME*. BUT HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN ABSENT IN THE EYE'S MISTY WORLD?

MAYHAP *IT* CAN TELL ME.

NAY, IT DOTH BE SHRUNKEN AND *LIFELESS*. ITS USEFULNESS HATH ENDED. I MUST--

WHAT BE THIS!?--*HEIMDALL!* GUARDIAN OF THE RAINBOW BRIDGE! I DID NOT ESPY HIM COLLAPSED 'PON BIFROST.

HIS BREAST-- UNMOVING! HIS HEART BE STILL... AS IN DEATH!

BUT WHAT POWER COULD SLAY THE E'ER VIGILANT HEIMDALL, AND NOT LEAVE A WOUND ON HIS BODY? AND IF HE BE SLAIN-- HOW FARES THE *REST* OF ASGARD?

'TIS THE SAME-- EVERYWHERE! E'EN HERE IN THE PALACE IMPERIAL... NOT A FIGURE STIRS. NOT THE SLIGHTEST MOVEMENT DO I SEE. WHAT DIRE CALAMITY HATH BEFALLEN ALL THOSE I HOLD DEAR?

I MUST SEEK THE *THRONEROOM*... IF ANSWERS THERE BE-- 'TIS *THERE* I SHALL FIND THEM.

FATHER!

HE ANSWERS NOT, THOUGH HE BE SEATED 'PON THE THRONE-- STILL HE DOTH MAKE NO SOUND OR MOTION.

AND AT HIS FEET--

--*SIF!* NAY... NOT THEE *TOO*, MY BELOVED! NOT THEE TOO!

STRANGE...WHILE I DETECT NO LIFE IN ODIN, HIS POSTURE DOTH SUGGEST *ALERTNESS.* HE IS UNLIKE THE OTHERS... RIGID...ERECT.

THAT DOTH ONLY DEEPEN THE MYSTERY, NOT LIGHTEN THE SORROW!

IS'T POSSIBLE, THAT WHILE I COMMUNED WITH THE *EYE,* THE TRUE *RAGNAROK*-- THE END OF THE GODS, AT LONG LAST HATH COME?

IF SO, IT HATH TAKEN *FORM* IN A MANNER NONE COULD HAVE FORE-TOLD!

BUT--*HOLD!* THERE BE ONE IN ASGARD WHOSE KNOWLEDGE DOTH SURPASS THAT OF ODIN HIMSELF... *MIMIR*--HE OF THE FIERY WELL!

LIKE A GOD POSSESSED, THE DESPERATE THUNDERER HASTENS FROM THE SILENT THRONEROOM, RACING THROUGH THE CASTLE'S HALLOWED HALLS...

...PAUSING BUT ONCE IN STARTLED DISBELIEF.

THE *ODINSWORD*-- *GONE*...SCABBARD AS WELL! BUT SHOULD THE SWORD BE DRAWN BY ANY SAVE ODIN, THE *CURSE* OF THE RHINE-GOLD WILL DESCEND 'PON ASGARD.

THAT MUST BE WHAT HATH TRANSPIRED-- AND MINE EYES BEHELD THE *RESULT* OF THE DREAD NIBELUNG CURSE WHEN FIRST I SET FOOT 'PON THE RAINBOW BRIDGE!? WHAT ENEMY OF ASGARD COULD HAVE DONE THIS?

MORE DEEPLY DISTURBED THAN BEFORE, THOR STORMS INTO THE CHAMBER OF THE WELL OF WISDOM...

MIMIR--ATTEND! THE SON OF ODIN DOTH COME SEEKING KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT HATH BEFALLEN ASGARD WHILE I WAS AWAY. *MIMIR*--?

CLOSER, ASGARDIAN... I CAN BARELY SPEAK.

WHAT--THY FLAME HATH *SHRIVELED* 'TIL 'TIS LITTLE MORE THAN A FLICKER.

WITH THE GODS DEAD, MY LIFE CANNOT LONG BE SUSTAINED. THE *EYE,* ODINSON... I CRAVE ITS IMMORTAL ESSENCE, 'TWILL STAVE OFF MINE OWN END.

AHH...NOW HEARKEN TO THE WORDS OF MIMIR, ODIN HATH TAKEN BACK THE *LIFE FORCE* HE ONCE GAVE TO ASGARD...ABSORBED IT INTO *HIMSELF*--AND THEN GONE TO EARTH TO CHALLENGE THE *CELESTIALS* AS A GOD AMONGST GODS! THE TIME HATH COME!

BUT ODIN'S BODY BE ON HIS THRONE, HOW HATH HE CONFRONTED THE MENACE WITHOUT LEAVING ASGARD?

'TWAS NOT HIS **BODY** WHICH HATH LEFT, FOOL--'TWAS HIS **SOUL.**

BEARD OF YMIR! DOST THOU MEAN--

ODIN HATH ENTERED THE DESTROYER?!

AT THAT INSTANT ON EARTH...

...THE ANDES MOUNTAINS TREMBLES WITH EACH IMPOSSIBLY LONG STRIDE HE TAKES. POSSESSED OF THE SPIRIT OF **ODIN** AND ALL THE **ASGARDIANS**--

--THE AWESOME AVENGER HAS GROWN **ENORMOUS** TO CONTAIN THE GOD-FORCE WHICH ANIMATES HIM.

AND OF ALL WHO HAVE EVER WALKED THE EARTH, HE **ALONE** CAN CHALLENGE THE CELESTIAL INVADERS.

FOR ONLY HE IS--

--THE DREAD DESTROYER!

AND HANGING FROM HIS SIDE--

THE OVERSWORD OF ASGARD!

THE GARGANTUAN **DOME** LOOMS BEFORE THE GLEAMING GIANT, DWARFING EVEN HIS MASSIVE FRAME. ON COUNTLESS WORLDS HAVE SUCH BARRIERS ARISEN--WHEREVER THE CELESTIALS HAVE SET DOWN... AND **ALWAYS** HAVE THESE CYCLOPEAN STRUCTURES PROVEN **IMPENETRABLE.**

BUT NEVER HAS THIS STRANGE ENCLOSURE FACED THE ONSLAUGHT OF--**THE DESTROYER!**

HIS **VISOR** SNAPS LOW OVER HIS FOREHEAD AS THROUGH IT THE GOD-LIKE GLADIATOR AMASSES ENORMOUS AMOUNTS OF **ELEMENTAL ENERGY**--ENOUGH TO BREACH THE OPAQUE OBSTRUCTION THAT WOULD KEEP HIM FROM HIS DESTINY.

THE DESTROYER PREPARES TO UNLEASH HIS MOST MIND-STAGGERING WEAPON, AGAINST WHICH NOTHING HAS EVER PREVAILED...THE POWER OF **TOTAL DISINTEGRATION.**

LIKE A BLOWTORCH PUT TO BUTTER, THE BLAZING RAY VAPORIZES THE ALIEN SUBSTANCE INSTANTLY, LEAVING A GAPING **HOLE** THROUGH WHICH THE DESTROYER MAY PASS.

AND EVEN AS HE STEPS WITHIN, HE IS UNKNOWINGLY FOLLOWED BY **ANOTHER** GROUP-ENTITY--

--THE UNCANNY **UNI-MIND**... THE COMBINED CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE CELESTIALS' FORMER SERVITORS--**THE ETERNALS**--MANIFEST IN A SINGLE BEING, WHOSE PURPOSE IS TO AID THE DESTROYER IN HIS STRUGGLE.

THE METALLIC GOLIATH DRAWS THE **ODINSWORD**... HE IS THE ULTIMATE KNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOR READY TO DO BATTLE AGAINST THE ULTIMATE THREAT...

...THE ASSEMBLED FOURTH CELESTIAL HOST!

AND PRESIDING OVER THE DRAMATIC TABLEAU-- **ARISHEM THE JUDGE,** ON WHOSE HUGE HAND IS IMPRINTED THE FORMULA FOR EARTH'S **ANNIHILATION,** SHOULD ITS PEOPLE BE DEEMED **UNWORTHY** BY THE CELESTIALS AT THE COMPLETION OF THEIR FIFTY-YEAR STAY.

FOR HALF A CENTURY SHALL ARISHEM STAND...HIS UN-FATHOMABLE MIND REACHING, GATHERING IMPRESSIONS FROM AN ENTIRE PLANET OF LIVING BEINGS...ASSIMILATING THEM... PONDERING THEM...AND FINALLY-- PASSING HIS IRREVOCABLE VERDICT... **LIFE OR DEATH!**

HARGEN THE MEASURER

TEFRAL THE SURVEYOR

NEZARR THE CALCULATOR

GAMMENON THE GATHERER

JEMIAH THE ANALYZER

ESON THE SEARCHER

ONEG THE PROBER

ZIRAN THE TESTER

YET ON ALL THOSE MANY WORLDS WHERE THE CELESTIALS HAVE CONDUCTED THEIR LIFE-EXPERIMENTS-- NEVER HAS A RACE PROVEN ITSELF DESERVING ENOUGH TO SURVIVE. THUS, ARISHEM'S DECREE HAS EVER BEEN--**DEATH!**

BUT EARTH HAS TWIN CHAMPIONS UNLIKE ANY OTHERS CONCEIVED BY THE COSMOS, WHO WILL NOT **WAIT** FOR THE DREAD DECISION TO BE REACHED DECADES HENCE. AND SO, HERE ON A SAND-SWEPT PERUVIAN PLAIN, THE FATE OF EARTH WILL IN MOMENTS BE **KNOWN.**

CHAPTER THREE

DAY OF ALPHA

THE CELESTIALS FACE THEIR ADVERSARY WITH EQUANIMITY, FOR NEVER HAS THEIR WILL BEEN **THWARTED**... NEVER THE CHALLENGER NOT BEEN **CRUSHED.**

THE ODINSWORD GLOWS GOLDEN WITH THE ENCHANTED POWER OF THE LONG-DORMANT **RHINE-GOLD** FROM WHICH IT WAS FORGED.

AND NOT IN ALL LIFE OR LEGEND HAS THE MERGING OF WEAPON AND WIELDER BEEN MORE PERFECT...THE UNITY MORE COMPLETE.

GAMMENON AND **JEMIAH** RELEASE THEIR OWN LATENT ENERGIES-- SEEMINGLY LASHING OUT AT THE DESTROYER IN THE INITIAL **TEST OF STRENGTH.**

BUT IT IS THE **UNI-MIND** TOWARD WHICH THE SPACE GODS HAVE AIMED. TWIN BLASTS STRIKE AS ONE, AND THE LEVITATING ENTITY **SPLITS** INTO ITS COMPONENT ELEMENTS...

...THE LIMP FIGURES OF THE **ETERNALS**, WHO DROP SOUNDLESSLY TO THE GROUND, AND LAY STILL.

WHILE BEYOND THE BARRIER...

...THE MIGHTY THOR STREAKS EARTHWARD THROUGH A RENT IN SPACE FORMED BY HIS MATCHLESS MALLET...

FLAMES OF SURTUR! THE CELESTIALS' DOME-- THE SAME UNYIELDING BARRIER WHICH DID ONCE RESIST E'EN THE REPEATED POUNDING OF MINE OWN HAMMER MJOLNIR... HATH BEEN SUNDERED!

THEN MY FATHER HATH PRECEDED ME HERE, FOR ONLY THE DESTROYER COULD ACCOMPLISH WHAT MINE URU MALLET COULD NOT.

WHAT BE THIS... ETERNALS, SPRAWLED AS IF IN DEATH! VICTIMS MAYHAP OF THEIR CELESTIAL MASTERS' TREACHERY! BUT WHERE BE--?

--THERE! THE DESTROYER... BUT GROWN LARGER THAN A STORM GIANT TO CONTEND WITH HIS FOES.

BUT CAN E'EN ONE POSSESSED OF THE ALL-MIGHTY ODINFORCE STAND 'GAINST THOSE WHO MAY LAY WASTE A UNIVERSE?

AS IF IN RESPONSE TO THOR'S UNSPOKEN QUERY, THE DESTROYER STRIKES-- SLASHING OFF THE ARM OF NEZZAR THE CALCULATOR, WHICH DROPS LIKE A FELLED REDWOOD TREE. INWARDLY, THE SON OF ODIN SMILES.

THE LOSS OF A LIMB MEANS **NOTHING** TO NEZZAR. ALREADY THE AIR CRACKLES WITH THE SOUND OF THE ARM'S REGENERATION.

THE DESTROYER PAUSES, WEIGHING HIS NEXT MOVE...THEN AGAIN DRAWS UPON THE UNSEEN ELEMENTAL ENERGIES AS ONLY HE IS ABLE.

HIS EYES ARE LIT BY INNER FIRES WHOSE ORIGINS WE MAY ONLY GUESS AT.

THE POWER OF ULTIMATE DISINTEGRATION IS AGAIN **UNLEASHED** IN A SINGLE WITHERING **BEAM**...

...ONLY TO BE PASSIVELY **DEFLECTED** BY A CASUALLY UPRAISED CELESTIAL HAND.

THE MAMMOTH WARRIOR IS BUFFETED BY A CELESTIAL BARRAGE WHICH **PIERCES** HIS ALLEGEDLY INDESTRUCTIBLE ARMOR...

...AND SENDS HIM REELING BACK--EVER BACK, WEAKENED...FORCED TO FIGHT LIKE A **WOUNDED BEAST.**

THE BATTLE GOES BADLY. AND SHOULD THE DESTROYER *PERISH*-- SO TOO MIGHT *ODIN* AND *ALL OF ASGARD* WHO HAVE GIVEN HIM LIFE.

THIS MUST NOT BE!

THOR MUST ENTER THE FRAY *HIMSELF*-- BRINGING DOWN 'PON THE CELESTIALS THE RAGING *STORM*--

--BEFORE WHICH THEY SHALL BE SWEPT LIKE FALLEN LEAVES.

KRAKK

THE DARK CLOUDS LOWER OVER THE GLADIATORS AS MIGHTY THOR DIRECTS HIS FURY THROUGH THE EVER-INCREASING **TEMPEST**...WITH NO MORE EFFECT ON THE CELESTIALS THAN A MILD SPRING RAIN.

ZIRAN GRASPS THE DESTROYER'S SWORD-ARM, FREEZING IT IN MID-ARC...

...AS BLOWS WHICH COULD PULVERIZE A PLANET GLANCE HARMLESSLY OFF HIM.

TEFRAL ENTERS THE COMBAT BLASTING THE ODIN-SWORD FROM THE DESTROYER'S GRASP--SEVERING A BOND THOUGHT TO BE UN-BREAKABLE.

THE **OVERSWORD** SHATTERS A PERUVIAN TEMPLE BEFORE COMING TO REST WHILE ITS AWESOME WIELDER AT LAST SINKS TO ONE KNEE, HEAD BOWED IN **DEFEAT**... PREY TO POWERS THAT KNOW NO EQUAL.

THEY GATHER ABOUT THE FALLEN FOE...

...AWAIT-ING ONLY A **GESTURE** FROM ARISHEM.

HE LOOKS DOWN AT THE RAVAGED HULK BEFORE HIM, THEN SLOWLY NODS HIS HEAD...

...AND THE DESTROYER DIES!

HAIRLINE SEAMS BURST INTO HUGE CRACKS AS HIS VERY SUBSTANCE DISSIPATES. FOR EVEN THIS SUPREME CREATION OF THE ALL-FATHER, WHOSE MOUNTAINOUS FRAME COULD PLACIDLY WITHSTAND THE EXPLOSION OF A SUPER-NOVA--

--CAN BUT FOR MERE **SECONDS** ENDURE THE INCALCULABLE IMPACT OF A COMBINED CELESTIAL **ASSAULT.**

ODIN'S **SPIRIT** AND THAT OF ALL THE ASGARDIANS IS **WRENCHED** HORRIBLY FROM THE DYING GIANT...SET HELPLESSLY **ADRIFT** LACKING A PHYSICAL CASING TO CONTAIN IT.

'TIS PAST ALL BELIEVING! THE DESTROYER-- OF WHOM ODIN BOASTED WAS *BEYOND* HARMING BY *ANY* FORCE-- HATH BEEN REDUCED TO A SLAG OF *MOLTEN METAL!*

*THROUGHOUT REALITY, THE **DEATH THROES** OF THE DESTROYER REVERBERATE. ODIN'S PEERS TREMBLE. THEY AGREED TO LET ODIN **REPRESENT** THEIR KIND, AND WITH HIS PASSING, THEY TOO SHALL SOON FALL.*

IF THE DESTROYER BE DESTROYED, WHAT OF HE WHO DID MAKE IT *LIVE*? WHAT OF THE ALL-FATHER??? *HE MUST HAVE DIED!!!*

YE SPACE-BORN KILLERS! YE WHO MASQUERADE AS CELESTIAL *DEITIES* WHEN YE ARE NAUGHT BUT *MURDERERS!*

MURDERERS!

BUT SO LONG AS THOR DOTH PREVAIL, THOSE WHO PERISHED HAVE A LIVING VESSEL TO CARRY OUT THEIR *VENGEANCE!*

AND SO LONG AS I HOLD THE MALLET *MJOLNIR*-- THAT VENGEANCE WILL BE MOST TERRIBLE! *FOR ODIN! FOR HONOR!*

FOR ASSSSGAAAAARRRD!

SPASHH!

THE CELESTIALS' REPLY IS SWIFT AND MERCILESSLY EFFECTIVE...

UGGGHHHH!

VILLAINS! DO THY WORST! FOR EVERY BLOW YE DO STRIKE-- THOR SHALL *RETURN* IT-- DOUBLED AND RE-DOUBLED IN POWER! SHOULD IT TAKE AN *ETERNITY* I WILL--

SKRASSH!

--ARRRGGHHH!

I'LL NOT *DIE*, CELESTIAL, THOUGH IT BE THY FONDEST WISH! THY ATTACK BUT *STRENGTHENS* MY WILL... FEEDS MY RESOLVE... STOKES THE FI--

--RAAAGGHH!

ODIN-- FORGIVE ME... I HAVE FAILED THEE...

SHOONK!

TRULY THEIR POWER IS BEYOND RECKONING. BUT IF I DIE, 'TWILL NOT BE UNDER THE MOCKING SHADOW OF *ARISHEM*.

HEAR ME, CELESTIAL! FOR TOO LONG HAST THOU STOOD ABOVE ALL LIFE IN THY ARROGANCE! 'TIS TIME THOU WERT REDUCED IN STATURE!

AND 'TIS THOR WHO SHALL SEE TO THE TASK!

WITH AN EAR-SPLITTING CRASH, THE MIGHTIEST WEAPON OF ASGARD SHATTERS THE **TWIN PYLONS**, UP-ROOTING THE SILENT GIANT IN A HAIL OF STONE FRAGMENTS!

AND THUS, FOR THE **FIRST TIME** IN ALL HIS ENDLESS EONS OF EXISTENCE...

...MIGHTY ARISHEM IS TOPPLED!

WHOOMM!

ARISHEM RISES FROM THE RUBBLE--A LEVIATHAN BEYOND CONFLICT. THE FALL WAS UTTERLY INCONSEQUENTIAL TO THE SUPREME CELESTIAL... NOT EVEN WORTH THE EFFORT TO PREVENT, FOR ARISHEM ACTS **ONLY** WHEN HE DEEMS IT NECESSARY.

MY *HAMMER*... IT HATH NOT RETURNED TO MY HAND--BEREFT OF THE ENCHANTMENT ODIN DID INFUSE IT WITH SO LONG AS HE LIVED. THEN THERE BE NO DOUBT... HE BE *DEAD*.

YET, *STILL* DOTH HOPE LINGER, FOR THE AWESOME *OVERSWORD* DOTH LIE IN *REACH*--AWAITING THE STRENGTH OF THOR TO HELP FULFILL ITS DIVINE *PURPOSE*.

THOU ART NOT RID OF ME, ARISHEM... FOR I DO CARRY FORTH THE FIGHT IN WHICH MY BELOVED FATHER AND ALL MY FELLOWS PERISHED. AND ON MY WORD AS THE LAST ASGARDIAN, THEIR DEATHS SHALL *NOT* HAVE BEEN IN VAIN.

I WILL SMITE THEE AND SEE *THEE* DEAD! FOR I DO BEAR THEE HATRED, CELESTIAL... *HATRED* BEYOND ALL EXPRESSION!

AND I SPIT 'PON YOU AND YOUR UNHOLY JUDGMENT!

HURLED BY THE MIGHTIEST ARMS IN ASGARD, THE GLEAMING BLADE **STRIKES** ITS MAMMOTH TARGET--PIERCING THE CELESTIAL'S CHEST WITH SUCH FORCE IT PASSES COMPLETELY **THROUGH**.

CHANNKK!

THE EFFORT HATH STOLEN THE LAST OF MY STRENGTH. BUT 'TWAS NOT *ENOUGH!* THOUGH THE OVERSWORD HATH IMBEDDED ITSELF IN THE CELESTIAL...THE GIANT SEEMS UNAFFECTED.

*ARISHEM DRAWS THE SWORD FROM HIMSELF...HAVING ALLOWED ITS ENTRY MERELY TO BETTER **ANALYZE** ITS ALIEN STRUCTURE AND MYSTIC PROPERTIES.*

THE PROCESS IS COMPLETED--AND HE CONSIDERS THE OBJECT'S DISPOSAL.

SUDDENLY, THE SUBSTANCE OF THE OVERSWORD MELTS AS CELESTIAL ENERGY COURSES THROUGH IT...

*...AND EVEN THE HEINOUS **CURSE** OF THE NIBELUNG IS **EXORCISED** IN ARISHEM'S INCOMPREHENSIBLE WAY.*

*THEN HE SLOWLY WHEELS UPON THE DEFIANT **FLEA** BEFORE HIM--REACHING DOWN.*

THE BATTLE BE OVER, AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH O'ERTAKES ME. *FATHER...* I COME TO JOIN THEE IN VALHALLA!

EH? A PINPRICK OF LIGHT DOTH APPEAR. IS'T AN ILLUSION I SEE OR--?

HOLD, MIGHTY ONE! STAY YOUR HAND AND SPARE THIS--MY *BLOODSON!*

NOW A *FIGURE* HATH APPEARED FROM THE GLOWING LIGHT--WITH THE VOICE OF A *WOMAN.*

I AM THE ELDER GODDESS KNOWN IN ALL LEGENDS AS *MOTHER EARTH.* AND I HAVE COME WITH AN OFFERING...

SHE GESTURES AND...

...*TWELVE* OF MY CHILDREN, SELECTED BY THE GODS OF THIS SPHERE FROM AMONG MANKIND'S BILLIONS.* EACH REPRESENTS THE *NOBLEST ACHIEVEMENTS*-- THE HIGHEST IDEALS TOWARD WHICH THE HUMAN RACE MAY ASPIRE.

AND THESE I OFFER TO YOU, CELESTIALS, IN EXCHANGE FOR THE *LIFE* OF THIS WORLD. THOUGH I LOVE EACH AS A CHILD, I AM WILLING TO PART WITH THEM.

**ODIN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE THE TWELVE WAS GATHERED BY THE WARRIORS THREE IN ISSUE #291. --J.S.*

I AM THE SPIRIT OF ALL *LIFE* ON EARTH. THROUGHOUT TIME, I HAVE WATCHED IT GROW AND NURTURED ITS STUMBLING PROGRESS. AND I WILL NOT SEE THE *FRUITS* OF MY LABORS DESTROYED BY *ANY* FORCE! WITH ALL MY *POWER* WILL I AID MY SONS AND DAUGHTERS.

LET THEM LEARN THE MYSTERIES OF THE *COSMOS* AT YOUR FEET. LET THEM BE AS *ONE* WITH YOU... AND DISCOVER HOW MUCH *YOU* HAVE TO LEARN FROM THEM--AND THOSE LIKE THEM ON COUNTLESS EARTHS.

I BESEECH YOU--*TAKE* MY LOVED ONES AND *LEAVE* THIS WORLD IN PEACE. CONSIDER THEM *YOUR* CHILDREN AS WELL, FOR THEY ARE CAST IN *YOUR* IMAGE AS MUCH AS IN MY OWN.

*FOR WHAT SEEMS AN **ETERNITY**, THE CELESTIALS CONFER. THEN ARISHEM STEPS FORWARD...*

...AND OUT-STRETCHES HIS ARM DRAMATI-CALLY.

*THE **FINAL JUDGMENT** HAS BEEN REACHED.*

EARTH WILL LIVE!

THE CELESTIALS **SURROUND** THE TWELVE WAITING MORTALS. EFFORTLESSLY, WITH NOT THE SLIGHTEST DISPLAY OF OUTWARD POWER, THEY **RISE** AND ARE SOON **LOST** TO THE HEAVENS ABOVE...

...LEAVING ONLY **TWO** BEHIND TO WATCH THE FINAL DEPARTURE.

THOU DIDST CALL ME--THY **BLOOD-SON?**

YES, I AM SHE WHO **BIRTHED** YOU, THOR. FOR I WAS ODIN'S **OTHER WIFE.**

WE AGREED NOT TO **SPEAK** OF OUR UNION WHEN WE PARTED AGES AGO... AND SO YOU HAVE NEVER KNOWN YOUR **TRUE** MOTHER.

MOTHER-- UHHH

SLEEP NOW, MY SON. THERE WILL BE NO REJOICING FOR US THIS DAY--ONLY MOURNING. I--THE LOSS OF A ***HUSBAND***... AND YOU...THE PASSING OF A ***FATHER.***

END

DEDICATED WITH RESPECT AND AFFECTION TO **STAN LEE** *AND* **JACK KIRBY**--*THE REAL ALL-FATHERS.*

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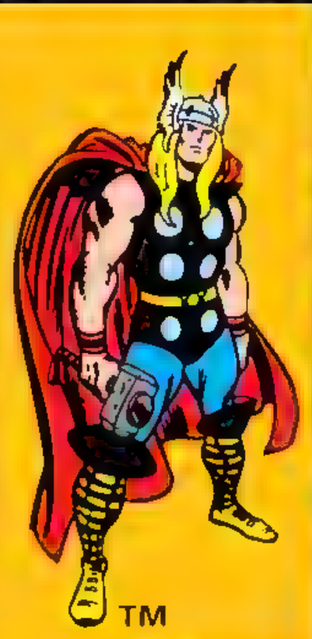

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THE MIGHTY

THOR™

...AT THE MERCY OF THE GODS!

pollard

When DR. DONALD BLAKE strikes his wooden walking-stick upon the ground, it becomes the mystic hammer MJOLNIR— and the lame physician is transformed into the Norse God of Thunder, Master of the Storm, Lord of the Living Lightning— and heir to the throne of eternal Asgard....

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR!®

FOR THE LIFE OF ASGARD!

HIGH IN THE ANDES MOUNTAINS, IN THE RUINS OF AN INCAN CITY, THE MIGHTY **THOR**, GOD OF THUNDER, LIES BATTERED AND UNCONSCIOUS.

ONLY MOMENTS AGO, HE FOUGHT THE GREATEST BATTLE OF HIS TEMPESTUOUS LIFE -- AND **LOST.**

NOW HE RESTS, OBLIVIOUS TO ALL BUT THE NUMBNESS THAT HAS OVERTAKEN HIM, IN THE ARMS OF THE AGELESS EARTH GODDESS WHO REVEALED HERSELF TO BE HIS LONG-LOST **MOTHER**...

SLEEP, VALIANT SON... DO NOT FEEL THE WOUNDS YOU HAVE INCURRED FOR THE SAKE OF ALL WHO LIVE. AND KNOW THIS, THAT THERE ARE NONE WHO FOUGHT MORE COURAGEOUSLY THAN YOU... NONE OF WHOM I AM MORE *PROUD.*

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THE EVENTS THAT CONCLUDED THIS DAY BEGAN SCANT YEARS BEFORE WITH THE LANDING OF THE **FOURTH CELESTIAL HOST**, AN EXPEDITION OF TEN UNIMAGINABLY POWERFUL ALIENS FROM BEYOND KNOWN SPACE.

THEIR PURPOSE WAS TO **JUDGE** WHETHER MANKIND--WHOSE GENETIC DEVELOPMENT THEY HAD DIRECTED IN AGES PAST--HAD PROVEN ITSELF WORTHY OF CONTINUED EXISTENCE.

LEARNING OF THEIR ARRIVAL, **ODIN**, THE SUPREME GOD OF ASGARD, SENT HIS IMMORTAL SPIRIT FROM HIS BODY TO ANIMATE THE DREAD **DESTROYER**--

--A NIGH-INVINCIBLE METALLIC WARRIOR ODIN HAD CONSTRUCTED A MILLENNIUM AGO FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF COMBATING THE CELESTIALS SHOULD THEIR VERDICT BE NAY.

ONCE WITHIN THE DESTROYER, THE ALL-FATHER GATHERED TO HIMSELF THE LIFE ESSENCES OF **EVERY GOD** IN THE GOLDEN REALM--

--LIFE ESSENCES THAT IN HIS DIVINE WISDOM HE HAD DISTRIBUTED AT THE DAWN OF THE AGE.

GROWING TO GARGANTUAN STATURE, THE DESTROYER SEIZED THE AWESOME **ODIN-SWORD**, AN ENCHANTED BLADE THAT CONTAINED THE DEADLIEST POWER IN ALL ASGARD.

ARMED FOR BATTLE, THE DESTROYER DESCENDED TO EARTH...

AT ITS SIDE FLEW THE UNCANNY **UNI-MIND**--

--A GROUP INTELLIGENCE MADE UP OF THE CELESTIALS' FORMER EARTHLY SERVITORS, THE **ETERNALS**.

WITH A SINGLE SEARING BLAST, THE UNI-MIND WAS **DISINTEGRATED** INTO ITS COMPONENT PARTS...

...WHILE THE DESTROYER LEAPED INTO THE FRAY, SAVAGELY STRIKING THE ENIGMATIC ALIENS WHO SURROUND IT.

BUT EVEN THE GREATEST WEAPON OF THE GODS WAS NO MATCH FOR THE CELESTIALS.

IN A PAROXYSM OF COSMIC ENERGY, THEY DESTROYED THE DESTROYER, SETTING ADRIFT THE LIFE FORCE OF ALL ASGARD.

THOR, THE ONLY GOD NOT IN ASGARD AT THE TIME OF THE GATHERING, WITNESSED HIS PEOPLE'S DEMISE WITH RAGE, AND THREW HIMSELF INTO THE CONFLAGRATION TO AVENGE HIS PERISHED PEOPLE...

WIELDING THE POWER OF THE **ELEMENTS**, THOR STRUCK WITH POWER ENOUGH TO LEVEL MOUNTAINS...

...BUT THE CELESTIALS WITHSTOOD HIS FUTILE BOMBARDMENT. FINALLY, WITH THE LAST VESTIGE OF HIS GODLY MIGHT, THOR HURLED THE FALLEN ODINSWORD--

--IMBEDDING IT IN THE CHEST OF **ARISHEM**, LEADER OF THE FOURTH HOST.

BUT ARISHEM SIMPLY **WITHDREW** THE SWORD FROM HIS IMPERVIOUS FORM, AND AFTER ANALYZING ITS MYSTIC PROPERTIES, **VAPORIZED** IT.

FOR THOR, ALL HOPE HAD STRAYED, WHEN SUDDENLY THE **ELDER GODDESS** OF THE VERY WORLD THE CELESTIALS SOUGHT TO JUDGE--MATERIALIZED.

ACCOMPANYING HER WERE THE **YOUNG GODS**, TWELVE CHOSEN MORTALS WHO EMBODIED THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE HUMAN RACE.

MOTHER EARTH OFFERED THE CELESTIALS EARTH'S FINEST CHILDREN, IN EXCHANGE FOR THE WORLD'S SALVATION.

AFTER DUE DELIBERATION, THE CELESTIALS **ACCEPTED** THE OFFERING, AND ASCENDED TO THE HEAVENS, THEIR CHARGES IN TOW.

THE CELESTIALS' **JUDGMENT** HAD BEEN GIVEN-- **EARTH SHALL ENDURE!**

BUT ALTHOUGH THE WORLD HAD SURVIVED ITS DAY OF JUDGMENT, ONE RACE OF GODS HAD NOT...SAVE FOR A SINGLE MEMBER...

THOR--MY CHILD... HOW I HAVE LONGED TO LET YOU KNOW YOUR MOTHER'S LOVE...

...BUT YOUR FATHER FORBADE ME TO SEE YOU, FOR FEAR YOU WOULD FORSAKE ASGARD FOR EARTH ENTIRELY.

AND NOW, WE ARE TOGETHER...ODIN IS NO MORE... AND YOU HOVER NEAR THE BRINK OF OBLIVION,

BUT ALTHOUGH YOUR FELLOW GODS HAVE ALL PASSED BEYOND THE PALE OF MY POWER, YOU, MY LOVED ONE, HAVE NOT...

AND BY THE RITES OF RENEWAL AT MY COMMAND, I SHALL HEAL THE WOUNDS OF YOUR FLESH AND MIND...

OHHH. MY HEAD FEELS LIGHT... AS IF 'TWERE FILLED WITH CLOUDS.

MY BODY TREMBLES WITH NEW VIGOR.

YOU! THEN 'TWAS NO DREAM...!

BEFORE I SUCCUMBED, I HEARD THEE CALL ME BLOODSON. CANST THOU TRULY BE--MY MOTHER?

YES, MY CHILD.

BUT WHO ART THOU? WHY HAS ODIN KEPT THINE IDENTITY CONCEALED FROM ME?

DID I HEAR THEE CALL THYSELF THE EARTH GODDESS?

I HAVE BEEN CALLED MANY THINGS OVER THE EONS OF MY EXISTENCE... EVERY PANTHEON OF GODS THAT HAS EVER LIVED HAS HAD ITS OWN NAME FOR ME:

GAEA...NERTHA...ADITI...COATLIQUE...RANGI... ALL THESE NAMES I HAVE ANSWERED TO, ALL THESE FORMS I HAVE ASSUMED...AND MORE.

MOST KNOW ME SIMPLY AS MOTHER EARTH, THE NATURE-SPIRIT OF ALL LIFE ON THIS FERTILE SPHERE.

I AM THE LAST OF THE ELDER GODS WHOSE EXISTENCE PREDATES THAT OF ALL OTHER GODS AND MEN.

MY KIND WAS THE *FIRST* OF ALL LIFE FORMS SPAWNED BY THE POTENT *SPIRITUAL FORCE* OF THIS PLANET. 'TWAS *WE* WHO SHAPED THE VERY FACE OF THE WORLD. WHEN MY KINSMEN WERE DRIVEN FROM THIS PLANE AS IF DEMONS, I REMAINED BEHIND, MY ESSENCE INFUSED IN ALL LIVING THINGS.

BUT HOW DIDST THOU COME TO BE MY MOTHER?

"AFTER ODIN UNLOCKED THE *LIVING ATOMS* STORED IN THE RELICS OF THE PREVIOUS AGE OF GODS, AND FORMED THE FIRST GENERATION OF THE *NEW ASGARD*--

"--HE DESIRED FOR HIMSELF A SON *UNLIKE* ANY OTHER...A GOD WHOSE STRENGTH WOULD NOT BE SOLELY DERIVED FROM THE SAME *SOURCE* AS HIS OWN...

"TOWARD THIS END, HE SOJOURNED TO *EARTH* TO SEEK THE COUNSEL OF THE ELDER GODDESS OF LIFE HERSELF-- HE CAME TO *ME*.

"I APPEARED TO HIM IN ONE OF MY MOST VOLUPTUOUS GUISES. HE CALLED ME *JORD*.

"IN THE DAYS WE SPENT IN MEDITATION, ODIN GREW TO LOVE ME WITH ALL HIS HEART AND ALL HIS MIND AND ALL HIS SOUL...

"THUS WE CONSUMMATED OUR LOVE.

"WHILE YOU GREW WITHIN ME, ODIN CONSTRUCTED A SPECIAL PALACE IN THE VERY WOMB OF THE EARTH. THERE, ATTENDED BY NYMPHS AND SPRITES I GAVE BIRTH TO YOU...

"AND ON THE JOYOUS DAY THAT ODIN FIRST HELD YOU, HIS NEW-BORN SON, HE WAS TRANSCENDANT WITH RAPTURE.

"WHEN YOU WERE WEANED, YOUR FATHER RELUCTANTLY BADE ME *FAREWELL*. DESPITE HIS MONTHS-LONG STAY ON EARTH, HIS PLACE WAS EVER TO BE IN ETERNAL ASGARD.

"WE AGREED IT WOULD BE BEST FOR YOU TO BE RAISED IN THE WAY OF ASGARD, NOT KNOWING OF YOUR *EARTHLY HERITAGE* TILL IT WAS APPROPRIATE.

"ODIN DELIVERED YOU TO HIS ORDAINED ASGARDIAN WIFE *FRIGGA*, TO RAISE AS HER OWN."

EVEN AS A CHILD, I KNEW FRIGGA WAS NOT MY *TRUE* MOTHER...

...BUT ODIN MADE IT KNOWN TO ALL THAT THE SUBJECT OF MY MOTHER WAS A FORBIDDEN ONE. 'TWAS TO SPARE FRIGGA'S FEELINGS, I WOULD SURMISE.

BUT I STILL DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHY ODIN SOUGHT A MATE NOT OF ASGARD.

POSSESSING THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE PREVIOUS AGE OF GODS, YOUR FATHER FORESAW THE NEED FOR A *CHAMPION* WHOSE POWER ON EARTH WOULD BE FAR *GREATER* THAN ANY OTHER OF HIS KIND. BECAUSE YOUR MOTHER IS THE VERY GODDESS OF THE EARTH, YOUR STRENGTH HERE IS GREATER THAN THAT OF YOUR FELLOWS.

AT LONG LAST I UNDERSTAND MY GREAT *AFFINITY* FOR THIS SPHERE.

AND WHAT OF THE *TWELVE YOUNG GODS*? ARE THEY TOO YOUR OFFSPRING?

ONLY INSOFAR AS ALL WHO LIVE ON THIS WORLD ARE MY CHILDREN...

"*AS* THEIR PART IN THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE COMING OF THE FOURTH CELESTIAL HOST, ALL OF THE CHIEF *MOTHER-GODDESSES* OF EARTH'S MANY PANTHEONS CONVENED IN THE REALM BETWEEN REALMS, EVEN AS THEIR HUSBANDS AND CONSORTS HAD DONE DAYS BEFORE...*

"WHILE THE SKY-FATHERS PREPARED FOR EVENTUAL WAR, THE EARTH-MOTHERS LAID THE FOUNDATIONS FOR *PEACE*. THEY DECIDED TO GROOM, FROM AMONG THEIR WORSHIPPERS ON EARTH, *TWELVE* WHO EPITOMIZED MANKIND'S GREAT ATTRIBUTES...

*AS SEEN LAST ISSUE. -- JIM.

"AND SO, OVER THE NEXT MILLENNIUM, EACH OF THE CHIEF GODDESSES KEPT WATCH OVER THE CHILDREN OF MAN, LOOKING FOR THE NEWBORN CHILD TO BE THEIR RACE'S *HERALD*...

"WHEN THAT CHOSEN CHILD REACHED MATURITY, HE OR SHE WAS CONTACTED BY ONE OF THE GODDESSES' *MESSENGERS*--

"--WHO UNLEASHED IN THEM THE *GODLY ESSENCE* POSSESSED BY ALL MANKIND.

"SO DOING, THE GODDESSES SOUGHT TO BRING *NEW LIFE* INTO THE COSMIC COMMUNITY AND THEREBY SAVE THE WORLD.

"THE LAST THREE CHOSEN ONES TO BE GATHERED WERE MET BY YOUR FRIEND AND COUNTRYMAN ***HEIMDALL***, GUARDIAN OF THE RAINBOW BRIDGE, SCANT YEARS BEFORE THE CELESTIALS' RETURN...*

**THOR #202-203. --JIM.*

"IN HER ABSENCE, FRIGGA HAD ENTRUSTED ODIN TO ATTEND TO THE FINAL ***ASCENSION*** OF THE YOUNG GODS. BECAUSE ODIN WAS EVEN THEN CONSERVING HIS STRENGTH FOR THE IMPENDING BATTLE WITH THE CELESTIALS, YOUR FATHER MANEUVERED THE BIOSPHERIC BEING CALLED ***EGO-PRIME*** TO ACTIVATE THE FINAL CHOSEN ONES' LATENT GODHOOD...

"AND SO, THE LAST OF THE TWELVE YOUNG GODS WERE BAPTIZED IN COSMIC FIRE...

"...AND TRANSPORTED TO THE ***UNDERGROUND TEMPLE*** WHERE THEIR PEERS--SOME OF WHOM WERE CHOSEN CENTURIES PREVIOUS-- SLUMBERED.

"IN ATTENDANCE--AS THEY HAD BEEN FOR THE PAST ***TWO DECADES***--WERE THE ***GODDESSES OF ASGARD.*** OVER THE MILLENNIUM, EACH PANTHEON'S MAJOR GODDESSES HAD TAKEN THEIR TURN GUARDING THIS MOST PRECIOUS OF TEMPLES. THE FINAL WATCH BELONGED TO ASGARD."

THIS THEN IS THE SECRET MISSION 'PON WHICH THE GODDESSES LEFT THE GLEAMING REALM NOT LONG AFTER I TOOK UP MY LATEST MORTAL IDENTITY, DON BLAKE!

UNTIL THEIR RECENT RETURN,* NONE KNEW OF THEIR WHEREABOUTS-- SAVE ODIN.

YOU MUST FORGIVE YOUR FATHER HIS MANY SECRETS AND VEXING MOODS THESE CENTURIES PAST. HE HAD BEEN UNDER AN INCREDIBLE STRAIN ANTICIPATING THE CELESTIALS...

THOU HAST ILLUMINATED ***MANY*** SHADOWY AREAS OF EVENTS PAST. I CAN NOW GUESS WHY ODIN ONCE SENT ME ON A QUEST FOR THE ORIGINS OF THE WORLD-DEVOURING ***GALACTUS***.** AND AS SOON AS I DISCOVERED GALACTUS' SECRETS HE STRANGELY LOST ALL INTEREST. ODIN MUST HAVE FEARED GALACTUS WAS A RENEGADE CELESTIAL.

EVEN THE THREATS OF PREMATURE ***RAGNAROK*** WHICH OCCURRED WITH ALARMING FREQUENCY THESE DECADES PAST WERE ***ODIN'S*** SECRET DOING...AS HE STRIVED TO SQUELCH THE ***FORCES OF EVIL*** FOR FEAR THEY WOULD ATTACK IN EARNEST WHILE HE WAS ENGAGED WITH THE CELESTIALS!

**THOR* 275.--JIM.*

***THOR* 168. --JIM AGAIN.*

I THANK THEE FOR THY ENLIGHTENMENT...MOTHER. BUT NOW I MUST HIE ME BACK TO *ASGARD*--TO APOLOGIZE TO ODIN FOR EVER DOUBTING HIS WISDOM, AND TO CELEBRATE THE VICTORY WON THIS DAY.

HOWEVER, FIRST I MUST LOCATE MY HAMMER LOST 'MIDST THIS RUBBLE DURING THE BATTLE.

I SHALL CAUSE THE GROUND TO YIELD IT UP TO YOU.

MY THANKS.

STRANGE...I CANNOT RECALL THE REASON WHY MINE HAMMER DID NOT *RETURN* TO ME, AND NOW THAT I THINK OF IT, SURELY IT HAS BEEN MORE THAN A *MINUTE* SINCE LAST I HELD *MJOLNIR*...YET I HAVE NOT BEEN TRANSFORMED TO MY HUMAN FORM, AS PER ODIN'S ENCHANTMENT!

THOR...HAS THE MEMORY OF SO TRAUMATIC AN EVENT TRULY BEEN *WASHED AWAY?*

THE REASON WHY ODIN'S SPELLS NO LONGER HOLD SWAY IS--

--ODIN IS DEAD!

DEAD? YES... I REMEMBER NOW!

ODIN'S LIFE FORCE--AND THAT OF *ALL* MY PEOPLE--WAS SCATTERED FAR FROM THEIR FORMS WHEN THE CELESTIALS SLAYED THE DESTROYER! HOW COULD I HAVE *FORGOTTEN* SUCH?!

WHEN I HEALED YOUR BODY'S WOUNDS, I FEAR I EASED YOUR *MIND'S PAIN* AS WELL.

OH, MOTHER--HAVE I GAINED *THEE* ONLY TO HAVE LOST *ALL ELSE* DEAR TO ME?

MY SON, *RAGNAROK*--THE TWILIGHT OF ASGARD--HAS *OCCURRED*, AND *YOU* ARE ITS SOLE SURVIVOR.

BUT *THIS* IS NOT THE WAY IT WAS FORETOLD TO END!

WAS IT NOT? HAVE NOT ALL THE ANCIENT *PROPHECIES* BEEN FULFILLED BY YOUR FATHER'S RECENT MACHINATIONS?*

*THOR #278.--JIM.

E'EN IF SO, THERE *MUST* BE A WAY TO REUNITE MY PEOPLE'S BODIES AND SOULS! *THERE MUST!*

GODS ARE MANIFESTATIONS OF A WORLD'S *SPIRITUAL LIFE-FORCE*, GIVEN SHAPE AND SUSTENANCE BY THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS OF ITS HIGHEST PHYSICAL LIFE-FORM. A GOD'S POWER STEMS FROM THE ETHEREAL ENERGY OF THE *HUMAN MIND*.

AS LONG AS THERE IS *BELIEF* OR *KNOWLEDGE* OF A GOD, HE WILL LIVE.

OVER THE PAST CENTURIES, BELIEF IN ASGARD HAS *WANED*. WHAT LITTLE REMAINS WAS NOT STRONG ENOUGH TO SURVIVE THE BRUTAL JOLT CAUSED BY THE DESTROYER'S DEMISE. I AM *SORRY*, MY SON...

NOOOO! BY ALL THAT IS *HOLY*, THERE MUST BE A WAY!!!

IF MANKIND DOES NOT HAVE THE ABILITY TO RESTORE MY PEOPLE, I SHALL SEEK ELSEWHERE!

PERHAPS THERE *IS* AN ALTERNATIVE, YOU MUST GO TO THE *OTHER PANTHEONS*...

...IF EACH OF THEM WILL RELINQUISH A PORTION OF ITS *POWER* TO YOU, YOU MAY HAVE ENOUGH TO RESURRECT YOUR PEOPLE.

I SHALL NOT *FAIL*. THANK YOU, MOTHER.

THOUGH I CANNOT TRAVEL FROM THIS SPHERE, I SHALL GUIDE YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY. MAY ALL THE GODS BE WITH YOU, THOR! *BLESSED BE!*

I PRAY WE MEET AGAIN.

I SHALL GO TO *OLYMPUS* FIRST, FOR THEY ARE FAMILIAR TO-- *HOLD!* BELOW ME CONGREGATE THE *ETERNALS*.

'TWOULD APPEAR THEY HAVE ALL RE-COVERED FROM THE DISSOLUTION OF THE *UNI-MIND!*

YET WHY DO THEY MILL ABOUT SO SOLEMNLY?

DESPITE THE GRAVITY OF THE TASK BEFORE ME, 'TWOULD BE ONLY PROPER TO BID MY ALLIES FAREWELL BEFORE I QUIT THIS PLANE!

THOR!

AJAK, WHY DO THY PEOPLE SEEM SO SOMBER -- EH, DO MY EYES DECEIVE ME?

NO, THUNDER GOD, THEY DO NOT. ZURAS, OUR KING, IS *DEAD*. HE WAS THE CORE OF THE UNI-MIND. WHEN THE CELESTIALS STRUCK, HE TOOK THE *BRUNT* OF THE BLAST, SPARING THE REST OF US. THUS DOES A FATHER SACRIFICE HIMSELF FOR HIS CHILDREN.

BUT, *IKARIS* -- THOU ONCE SAID THAT ETERNALS CANNOT DIE!

WHAT THE CELESTIALS CREATED, THEY CAN ALSO DESTROY.

THEN THOU MUST GO WITH ME ON MY QUEST. I SEEK TO REVIVE THE FALLEN GODS OF ASGARD BY COLLECTING ENERGY FROM THE *OTHER GODS* OF EARTH.

I'M AFRAID THAT WILL NOT HELP ZURAS, THOUGH ETERNALS HAVE KNOWN WORSHIP, WE ARE *NOT* GODS, EMPOWERED BY THE BELIEF OF OUR LESSERS. WE ARE SIMPLY A HIGHER ORDER OF *HUMAN*.

I HAD... FORGOTTEN.

THOU WERT A GOOD AND NOBLE SIRE, GREAT ZURAS. THY MEMORY SHALL ENDURE. BE AT PEACE.

NOW I MUST LEAVE THE ETERNALS TO THEIR *GRIEF*... IF I DELAY MUCH LONGER, EARTH MAY HAVE LOST *MORE* THAN ITS CHIEF ETERNAL.

THOR -- I OVERHEARD ABOUT THE QUEST YOU ARE ABOUT TO UNDERTAKE.

SERSI ?

IT SEEMS TO ME YOU ARE *CLAD* FAR TOO HUMBLY FOR SO MOMENTOUS A MISSION.

MY TATTERED CLOTHING REFORMS ABOUT ME! BUT I THOUGHT THOU WERT BUT A MISTRESS OF *ILLUSIONS*.

THAT IS WHAT I HAD WISHED YOU TO BELIEVE. I AM ACTUALLY A MOLECULAR REARRANGER.

MY THANKS, ETERNAL. SOMEDAY I SHALL RETURN THY KINDNESS.

FAREWELL TO THEE.

HURLING HIS INCREDIBLE URU HAMMER WITH ALL HIS MIGHT, THE THUNDER GOD HOLDS FAST TO ITS THONG AND STREAKS INTO THE STRATOSPHERE. THERE HE USES THE MALLET'S POWER TO TRANSGRESS THE **FABRIC OF INFINITY** ITSELF...

'TIS FORTUNATE THAT ALL-FATHER ODIN'S... STATE... AFFECTS ONLY MY HAMMER'S ENCHANTMENTS. ITS INNATE SPACE-SPANNING POWERS SEEM INTACT!

THROUGH THE SPACE BETWEEN MYTH-REALMS THOR TRAVELS. HIS DESTINATION--THE OTHER-WORLDLY SPIRES OF **MOUNT OLYMPUS**, HOME OF THE GODS OF ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME...

SOON, BEFORE THE COUNCIL OF OLYMPIANS...

HAIL, O **ZEUS**, PEER OF HE WHO SIRED ME. I COME TO YOU WITH A **BOON** I MOST DESPERATELY CRAVE.

HAIL TO THEE, TOO, ASGARDIAN. WE HAVE ALL WITNESSED YOUR BATTLE WITH THE CELESTIALS.

I MUST COMMEND THEE ON THY GREAT COURAGE AND VALOR. SOMETIMES I THINK THOU ART THE **BRAVEST** OF US ALL-- OR THE MOST **FOOLHARDY.**

WHY DIDST THOU BUT SIT AND **WATCH** AS ODIN AND I BATTLED FOR THE SAKE OF **ALL** GODS AND MEN? WHY DIDST THOU NOT **JOIN** US?

'TWAS AS WE **AGREED**, ODINSON. HAD **GAEA** NOT INTERVENED, WE OF OLYMPUS WOULD HAVE JOINED THE FRAY NEXT... AYE, AND PROBABLY PERISHED AS YOUR KIND DID.

I AM TOLD THAT ODIN AND ALL ASGARD MIGHT BE SAVED IF I CAN OBTAIN A SMALL **PORTION** OF EACH PANTHEON'S **POWER**...

IF POWER THOU NEEDS, SCION OF ASGARD, POWER THOU SHALT HAVE! ODIN HAS ALWAYS BEEN A VALUED ALLY AND I WOULD SORELY MISS HIM AND HIS NORTHERN GRIMNESS WERE HE GONE.

APPROACH, ODINSON.

WITH MY TOUCH I BEQUEATH TO YOU A FRACTION OF THE LIFE FORCE OF OLYMPUS.

MAY ALL MY FELLOW GODHEADS BE AS GENEROUS TO YOU.

I THANK THEE, MOST GRACIOUS LORD.

I SHALL NOT FORGET THY BLESS-ING AS LONG AS I MAY LIVE.

HURLING HIMSELF THROUGH ANOTHER DIMENSIONAL VORTEX, THOR SOON COMES UPON THE GLEAMING PATH OF THE GODS...

A PATH WHICH LEADS HIM TO THE CITY OF HELIOPOLIS, REALM OF THE EGYPTIAN GODS...

HAIL, GREAT *OSIRIS*, SKY-FATHER OF THE GOLDEN REALM. I COME BEFORE THEE TO ASK THE MOST SOLEMN OF FAVORS--MY FATHER AND ALL MY PEOPLE HAVE FALLEN, AND I NEED THY HELP TO RAISE THEM!

YOUR WISH IS MY COMMAND, ASGARDIAN. TWICE HAVE YOU COME TO THE AID OF HELIOPOLIS AGAINST MY EVIL SON *SETH*.* LONG HAVE I WISHED TO REPAY YOU.

BESIDES, YOUR SIRE IS THE RE-INCARNATION OF OUR LONG-DEPARTED SUN-LORD *ATUM-RE*, AND MUCH DO WE OWE HIM, TOO.

**THOR* 245 AND MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE*'S 22-23--JIM.*

WE, THE GODS OF ANCIENT EGYPT, ARE PERHAPS THE *OLDEST* SURVIVING *PANTHEON OF EARTH.*

I HOPE TO BESTOW UPON ASGARD THE LONG LIFE WE HAVE KNOWN.

BIDDING THE EGYPTIAN DEITIES FAREWELL, THE MIGHTY THOR ONCE AGAIN SPEEDS BETWEEN THE DIMENSIONS WHICH SEPARATE THE MANY GOD-REALMS, PROPELLED BY HIS MYSTIC MALLET...

THUS FAR THERE HAS BEEN NO PROBLEM GATHERING THE POWER I NEED, BUT THE GREEKS AND THE EGYPTIANS BE ALLIES OF ASGARD. HOW SHALL I FARE AMONGST STRANGERS?

*SOON, IN THE DOMAIN OF **TA-LO**, THE HIGHEST OF THE 36 HEAVENS OF THE GODS OF CHINESE LEGEND...*

GREETINGS, NOBLE LORD, I AM *THOR* OF ASGARD. THOUGH NEVER BEFORE HAVE WE MET, I SEEK A FAVOR OF THEE...

MY SEERS HAVE INFORMED ME WHY YOU HAVE COME, NORSE GOD...

BY THE POWER INVESTED ME AS JADE EMPEROR OF THE GODS, I, *YU-HUANG*, DO FREELY GIVE TO YOU A PORTION OF MY PEOPLE'S POWER.

AND ON BEHALF OF MY RACE, YU-HUANG, I THANK THEE. THE SPLENDORS OF YOUR CITY ARE ONLY SURPASSED BY YOUR GRACIOUSNESS.

THUS DOES THE THUNDER GOD JOURNEY THROUGH THE MYRIAD MYTH-REALMS, HUMBLING HIMSELF BEFORE THE GODHEADS OF RACES THAT UNTIL TODAY HE KNEW NOT EXISTED...

INCA...

AZTEC...

ESKIMO...

PERSIAN...

CELTIC...

ABORIGINAL...

JAPANESE...

AFRICAN...

NATIVE AMERICAN...

HE LEARNS THAT NEARLY **ALL** OF THE PANTHEONS HAD WITNESSED HIS BATTLE WITH THE **CELESTIALS**...AND WOULD SEE ASGARD RISE AGAIN FOR ITS SACRIFICE IN EARTH'S BEHALF...

FINALLY, THE NORSE GOD REACHES THE FINAL STOP ON HIS QUEST, THE PLACE CALLED **NIRVANA**, DWELLING PLACE OF THE HINDU GODS AND GODDESSES...

TRIUNE GREETINGS TO YOU, NORTHERNER...

HAIL *VISHNU*, PEER OF MY FATHER.

I SEE THAT ODIN HAS ACCOMPLISHED THE PLAN WE DEVISED A MILLENNIUM AGO. I AM PLEASED.

AYE, HE ACCOMPLISHED IT, AT THE COST OF HIS LIFE AND THOSE OF ALL MY PEOPLE. I NEED THY HELP IF I AM TO RESURRECT THEM.

AS THE *PRESERVER-FORCE*, ALL LIFE IS SACRED TO ME. I WOULD SEE YOUR KIND *SURVIVE*. HOWEVER, IT IS A *TRINITY* THAT RULES HERE, AND WE MUST HAVE A CONSENSUS BEFORE WE CAN ACT. *BRAHMA?*

AS THE *CREATOR-FORCE*, I AM NOT CERTAIN IF IT IS APPROPRIATE TO REVIVE OLD ASGARD. IF WE LET IT DIE, WILL NOT A NEW ONE BE BORN OF ITS ASHES? IS NOT DEATH A PART OF THE CONTINUING CREATION, *SHIVA?*

YES. AND AS *DESTROYER-FORCE*, I WOULD SEE ASGARD PERISH. IT HAS FULFILLED ITS PURPOSE. WHY NOT LET *NEW GODS* HAVE ITS ENERGIES?

THOR STANDS SPEECHLESS... UNBELIEVING. AFTER ALL HIS TRIALS, THE LAST OF THE PANTHEONS DARES REFUSE THEIR AID?

THEN...

I AM SORRY, ASGARDIAN. THE CONSENSUS IS THAT WE DO *NOT* GRANT YOU AID.

HOLD--IF THERE BE SOMETHING YE WANT IN RETURN, NAME IT AND--!

YOU HAVE NOTHING THAT COULD INTEREST US, BARBARIAN.

BARBARIAN? AYE--*WARRIOR!* I HAVE COME TOO FAR IN MY QUEST. IF YE WILL NOT GIVE UP A SLIVER OF YOUR POWER, I SHALL BATTLE YE FOR IT!

YOUR PROPOSITION INTERESTS ME, WHELP.

HAD YOU LEFT WHEN BIDDEN, I MIGHT HAVE SPARED YOU, BUT NOW YOU HAVE MOVED ME TO ACT. IF YOU WANT TO SEE YOUR FALLEN COMRADES AGAIN SO BADLY, SEE THEM YOU SHALL--

--IN DEATH!

DO THY WORST, SHIVA-- I FEAR NEITHER DEATH NOR *YOU!*

UNNNGH! DESPITE HIS GIRTH, HE IS MOST QUICK AND AGILE. AND WHILE I HAVE BUT *ONE* WEAPON, HE HAS *FOUR!*

BUT WHILE MINE IS THE AWESOME URU HAMMER, I AM STOOD IN GOOD STEAD.

YOU DEFLECT MY DEATH-SHAFTS ADEPTLY, ASGARDIAN!

THOU SHALT FIND *MJOLNIR* GOOD FOR MORE THAN THAT, HINDU!

PERHAPS YOUR WEAPON WOULD LIKE TO MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF *MINE.*

'TIS BEYOND ALL BELIEVING! SHIVA DISPATCHED HIS WEAPONS SO QUICKLY THAT HIS *CLUB* HAS MET MJOLNIR IN FLIGHT!

--WHILE HIS *SPEAR* HAS SAILED PAST UNTHWARTED TO PIN ME 'GAINST YON PALACE WALL!

PERISH, YELLOWHAIR! PERISH IN THE EMBRACE OF MY *LIGHTNING-SPEAR!*

BY THE *NORNS!* I HAVE FORGOTTEN THAT MY MALLET NEED NO LONGER RETURN TO MY HAND! WITHOUT IT, HOW CAN I BREAK FREE?

BUT WAIT--

--IT HATH RECOILED FROM ITS IMPACT WITH SHIVA'S CLUB WITH SUCH FORCE--

--THAT IT HURLS WITHIN MY *REACH!*

IT IS MINE!

NOW AS LORD OF THE LIVING LIGHTNING, I SHALL QUELL THIS RAGING DISCHARGE!

QUITE IMPRESSIVE, STORMGOD. I AM BEGINNING TO ADMIRE YOU EVER SO LITTLE.

BUT IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN MY CURSE TO IDENTIFY WITH THAT I AM DUTY-BOUND TO *DESTROY.*

I MUST REMEMBER *NOT* TO LET LOOSE MY MALLET, LEST I FORFEIT IT!

'TIS DONE.

HE IS CAUGHT OFF BALANCE WITH THE SUDDENNESS OF MY ATTACK!

UHHH... HE HAS RECOVERED FROM THE COLLISION AS QUICKLY AS I!

I AM SURPRISED YOU HAVE NOT YET ABANDONED HOPE, THOR--

--HAVE YOU NOT REALIZED THAT YOUR TWO ARMS ARE NO MATCH FOR MY *FOUR*?

SEE HOW QUICKLY I AM ABLE TO GAIN THE UPPER HAND?

THOU ART MISTAKEN IF THOU THINK MIGHT IS BUT A MEASURE OF ONE'S *ARMS!*

HE STAGGERS BUT YET STANDS. WHAT DOTH IT TAKE TO *DEFEAT* THIS GOD?

AGAIN YOU HAVE GIVEN ME REASON TO RESPECT YOUR BATTLE PROWESS--

--BUT YOU FIGHT A HOPELESS BATTLE. FOR I AM AN *ASCENDANT* GOD, WHILE YOU ARE A GOD PAST HIS HEYDAY!

RAVE ON, MADGOD. I SHALL TRY TO MATCH THE *WIND* OF YOUR *WORDS* WITH THAT OF MY HAMMER.

I MUST NOT LET SHIVA SUSPECT WHAT MY *TRUE PURPOSE* IN CREATING THIS VORTEX BE TILL IT IS TOO LATE!

YOU SEEK TO DISORIENT ME WITH A MERE TEMPEST, EH, STORM-BRINGER? *BAH!* IT IS TIME TO DISPENSE WITH SUCH NONSENSE. IT IS TIME YOU FELT THE *FIERY GLARE* OF MY *THIRD EYE.*

I HAVE PARALYZED YOU--

--AND NOW YOU ARE A *SLAVE* TO MY WILL. I COMMAND YOU TO CEASE THIS FUTILE WINDSTORM AND PREPARE FOR YOUR *DESTRUCTION.*

AH, YOUR WEAPON SLOWS IN ITS SPIRAL PATH. NOW I-- WHAT'S THIS?

YOUR HAMMER HAS SPIRITED ME FROM *NIRVANA!*

HE AVERTED HIS GAZE, FREEING ME!

THOU ART NOW ON THE *BIFROST BRIDGE*, ENTRANCE TO *MY* HOMELAND OF *ASGARD!*

SO YOU THINK TO *OUTWIT* ME SINCE YOU CAN'T *OUT-FIGHT* ME!

NAY, VARLET, I SHALL DO BOTH.

I REALIZED THAT ON THY OWN GROUND, THOU MIGHT BE INVINCIBLE--

--BUT HERE, *THOR STANDS SUPREME!*

OUNNFF!

THUS DO I RID THEE OF THY REMAINING WEAPONS--

--AND SO SHALL I *VANQUISH* THEE!

THIS IS HOW YOU WOULD HAVE VICTORY-- BY *BLUDGEONING* A WEAPONLESS ENEMY?

NO, I SHALL SHEATHE MY WEAPON AND FIGHT THEE HAND TO HAND!

YEA, I SHALL BEAT THEE *FAIRLY*-- THOUGH I NOTE THAT YOU HAD NO COMPUNCTIONS 'GAINST OUTNUMBERING ME WITH *THY* WEAPONS.

I AM THE *DESTROYER-FORCE*. I AM NOT BOUND BY THE PETTY CODE OF ETHICS I SENSED IN YOU! MY SOLE FUNCTION IS TO AUGMENT THE ETERNAL BALANCE BY DEALING *DEATH!*

I AM *THE AVENGER*-- THE SOLE HOPE FOR MY PEOPLE'S REDEMPTION. I AM EMPOWERED BY THE MEMORY OF MY GLORIOUS RACE!

'GAINST MY RIGHTEOUS WRATH, NOT E'EN ALL THE *DEATH-GODS* IN ETERNITY SHALL PREVAIL!

NOW, DESTROYER-FORCE-- I SHALL ASK THEE BUT *ONCE MORE*--

--WILT THOU GIVE TO ME THE *LIFE-FORCE* I REQUIRE--

--OR WILL I BE FORCED TO TOSS THEE INTO THE *YAWNING VOID* BETWEEN WORLDS...

...THERE TO DRIFT TILL OBLIVION TAKES THEE?

YOU *WIN*, TWO-ARMS-- PUT ME *DOWN!*

IT WOULD SEEM THAT YOUR PASSION FOR LIFE IS GREATER THAN MY PASSION FOR DESTRUCTION THIS DAY. SOMEDAY THIS WILL NOT BE SO.

ART THOU EMPOWERED TO GIVE ENERGY ON THY RACE'S BEHALF?

YES, ASGARDIAN...AND BEGRUDGINGLY I ENDOW YOUR WEAPON WITH THE SPARK OF MY PANTHEON'S *LIFE ESSENCE.*

NOW SEND ME HOME.

AGREED. GO THEN AND THANK THY PEOPLE FOR THIS GIFT. AND THOUGH I DO NOT COMPREHEND THE OBSESSION THAT MOVES YOU, I DO RESPECT YOU AS AN ABLE FOEMAN!

YOU HAVE WON THIS TIME, STORMGOD, FOR I UNDERESTIMATED YOU.

BUT KNOW YOU THIS: YOU HAVE MADE A POWERFUL ENEMY THIS DAY, AND WHEN NEXT WE CLASH, VICTORY SHALL GO TO *SHIVA!*

THIS IS A MATTER FOR ANOTHER TIME. *NOW* I MUST DELIVER THE POWER OF THE PANTHEONS TO HIM WHO IS THE HEART AND SOUL OF ASGARD--

*REVERENTLY, THOR APPROACHES THE THRONE WHERE ALL-FATHER **ODIN** SITS STIFFLY, LIFELESSLY, LADY **SIF** AND QUEEN **FRIGGA** AT HIS FEET...*

I PRAY THAT THIS SUCCEEDS.

WITH A SURGE OF SHEER DETERMINATION, THOR COMMANDS HIS MIGHTY MALLET TO **UNLEASH** ITS PENT-UP POWER AT THE IMMOBILE FIGURE OF HIS FATHER BEFORE HIM.

AND WHEN THE HAMMER'S RECENTLY-ACQUIRED ENERGIES ARE EXHAUSTED...

...NOTHING HAS CHANGED.

I HAVE FAILED! THE LIFE FORCE OF THE OTHER GODS WAS NOT ENOUGH! MOTHER EARTH WARNED THAT MY CHANCE OF SUCCESS WAS SLIM, BUT I REFUSED TO ACCEPT IT. O *ASGARD*... ODIN...I HAVE LOST THEE!

THEN... WEEP NO MORE, MY SON. I AM *RISEN.*

F-FATHER?

STAND THEE BACK-- I HAVE A SACRED TASK TO PERFORM.

FROM THE GAUNTLETED HAND OF THE ALL-FATHER FLOWS THE LIVING ENERGY OF ALL GODS...

...AND AS ODIN ONCE BESTOWED LIFE UPON THESE GODS OVER TWO THOUSAND YEARS AGO, SO DOES HE AGAIN THIS DAY.

AND AS ALL ASGARD STIRS FROM ITS DEATH-LIKE SLUMBER...

NOW COME TO ME, MY SON-- LET ME FEEL THY STRONG EMBRACE.

MY FATHER, IT IS GOOD TO SEE THEE ALIVE!

AYE, THANKS TO THEE, THOU HAST SAVED US ALL THIS DAY. NE'ER HAS A SON MADE A FATHER MORE PROUD.

I-I WISH TO APOLOGIZE, MILORD, FOR E'ER DOUBTING YOUR LOVE FOR ME OR FOR EARTH. I KNOW NOW--

HUSH, THOR. THERE WILL BE TIME FOR TALK LATER. NOW 'TIS TIME TO *REJOICE*--AYE, REJOICE, FOR *RAGNAROK* HAS COME AND *GONE* AND WE ALL HAVE LIVED TO TELL OF IT.

THUS THE PROCLAMATION GOES FORTH THROUGHOUT THE LAND INVITING ALL THE GODS AND HEROES OF ASGARD TO GATHER IN ODIN'S GREAT DINING HALL...

SOON THE CAVERNOUS CHAMBER RINGS WITH MERRIMENT AND MUSIC, TALES AND TOURNAMENTS... AS THE CITIZENS OF ASGARD CELEBRATE THEIR VICTORY OVER **DEATH** ITSELF.

AND NINE DAYS LATER, THE SOUNDS OF JOYOUS CELEBRATION **STILL** ECHO ACROSS THE REALM ETERNAL.

FIN

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THE MIGHTY

THOR™

TRAPPED WITHIN MY POWER-PRISM, WITHOUT YOUR HAMMER, YOU'RE NOW COMPLETELY HELPLESS!

NEVER BEFORE HAS THOR BATTLED A MENACE AS BIZARRE AND POWERFUL AS

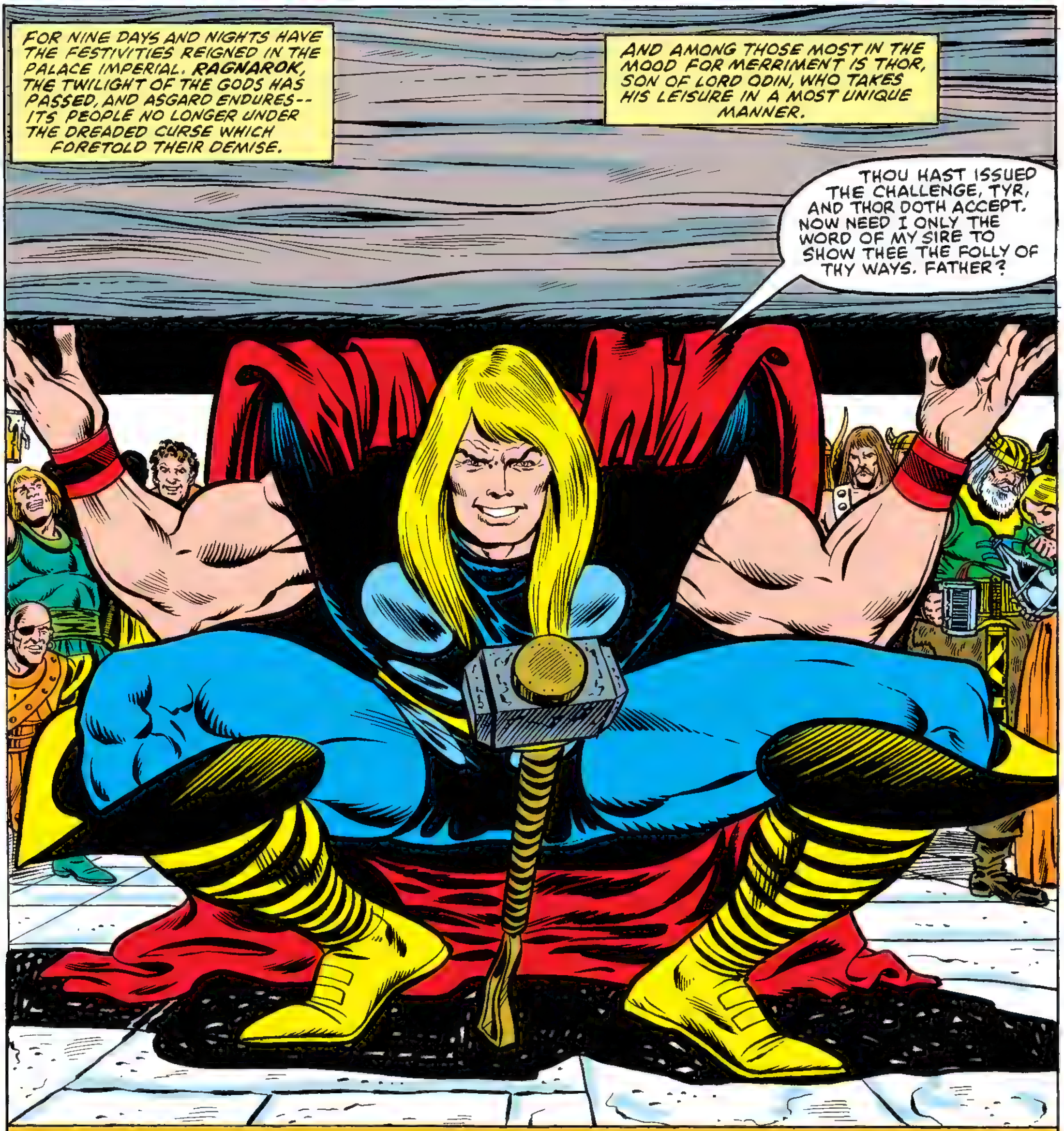
LOCUS!

pollard

When DR. DONALD BLAKE strikes his wooden walking-stick upon the ground, it becomes the mystic hammer MJOLNIR— and the lame physician is transformed into the Norse God of Thunder, Master of the Storm, Lord of the Living Lightning— and heir to the throne of eternal Asgard....

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR!®

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO KILL!


FOR NINE DAYS AND NIGHTS HAVE THE FESTIVITIES REIGNED IN THE PALACE IMPERIAL. RAGNAROK, THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS HAS PASSED, AND ASGARD ENDURES-- ITS PEOPLE NO LONGER UNDER THE DREADED CURSE WHICH FORETOLD THEIR DEMISE.
AND AMONG THOSE MOST IN THE MOOD FOR MERRIMENT IS THOR, SON OF LORD ODIN, WHO TAKES HIS LEISURE IN A MOST UNIQUE MANNER.
THOU HAST ISSUED THE CHALLENGE, TYR, AND THOR DOTH ACCEPT. NOW NEED I ONLY THE WORD OF MY SIRE TO SHOW THEE THE FOLLY OF THY WAYS. FATHER?

MARK GRUENWALD & RALPH MACCHIO WRITERS * KEITH POLLARD LAYOUTS * CHIC STONE & AL MILGROM FINISHES * JOE ROSEN LETTERS * GEORGE ROUSSOS COLORS * JIM SALICRUP EDITOR * JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

LET THE CONTEST BEGIN...AND SHOULD THOR FAIL TO LIFT YON TABLE FULLY FROM THE FLOOR,THEN WILL TYR HAVE WON HIS WAGER. ART THOU READY, MY SON?

AYE, FATHER, READY TO SILENCE THE BRAGGART WHO DEIGNED MAKE LIGHT OF MY STRENGTH.

DOTH THAT SNEER MEAN THOU EXPECTS TO COLLECT, WAR-GOD?

INDEED. FOR DAYS OF ALE AND EASE HAVE TAKEN THEIR TOLL ON MIGHTY THOR. THOU SHALT SEE.

NAY, 'TIS THOU WHO SHALT SEE, WILY ONE...

...SEE THAT NOW AND FOREVERMORE THROUGHOUT THE REALM ETERNAL, THE SINEWS OF THOR BE IN POWER--

STEADY THYSELF, VOLSTAGG, ELSE WE'LL FALL!

WHAT! THE LION OF ASGARD FALL--WITH LEGS LIKE OAKS! NEVER!

AYE, THOU ART QUIVERING TOO GREATLY TO TOPPLE, VAST ONE.

--UNEQUALLED!!

SKRASH

THE DEED IS DONE! HAILTHOR! TRULY BE HE MIGHTIEST OF THE MIGHTY!

AND SHOULD THE SUDDENLY SILENT TYR E'ER FORGET THAT, MAYHAP STRUMMING MINSTRELS WILL REMIND HIM IN SONG OF MY FEAT THIS DAY IN AGES TO COME.

THUMP

THUMP

AND NOW THERE BE THE MATTER OF PAYMENT... WHICH I WILL GLADLY FOREGO SHOULD TYR BUT *EQUAL* MY SMALL DISPLAY WITH ONE OF HIS OWN.

THY GENEROSITY O'ERWHELMS ME, ODINSON, THOUGH IN TRUTH I MUST DECLINE THY OFFER.

AS THOU KNOWEST, THE LOSS OF MY HAND-- TAKEN IN ASGARD'S CAUSE DOTH PREVENT ME FROM ENGAGING IN SUCH SPORT.

NOW HERE BE THY PRIZE... COIN OF THE REALM--HEARTILY OFFERED AND HARD-WON. I SALUTE THEE.

LOKI, MY HUSBAND, WHY ART THOU SO GLUM. THOU HAST BARELY TOUCHED THY FOOD.

SIGYN SPEAKS TRUE, GOD OF MISCHIEF. YOUR QUEEN BIDS YOU PARTAKE OF THE CELEBRATION ERE IT ENDS.

FOR LOKI, GRACIOUS FRIGGA, THERE CAN BE NO CELEBRATION...

...NAY, NOT SO LONG AS I BE *SHACKLED* TO MY WIFE--AT ODIN'S COMMAND-- SHACKLED FOR MY CRIMES LIKE SOME UNRULY MONGREL!

BUT, HUSBAND, ISN'T THIS PUNISHMENT FOR CONSPIRING 'GAINST ASGARD NOT MORE MERCIFUL THAN BEING CHAINED TO A ROCK WITH A SNAKE'S VENOM SCALDING YOU... AS ONCE YOU WERE FORCED TO ENDURE.

CEASE THY PRATTLING, WOMAN. THY WIFELY CONCERN SICKENS ME.

AND WHAT OF THEE, BRAVE BALDER, NOBLEST OF SONS. WHY THY DOUR COUNTENANCE? BETWEEN THEE AND LOKI, I COULD ALMOST BELIEVE YE ARE NOT HAPPY TO BE ALIVE.

THOU FORGET, MY QUEEN, I HAVE KNOWN THE ICY TOUCH OF *DEATH*, NOT MERE OBLIVION LIKE THOSE OF YOU WHOSE ESSENCES LORD ODIN BORROWED TO STAVE OFF RAGNAROK.

I AM NOT YET RECONCILED WITH MY NEW LEASE ON LIFE. I FEEL... DIFFERENT NOW...DIFFERENT IN WAYS BEYOND MEASURE.

AHH, WHAT THOU NEEDS IS TO FEEL THE WEIGHT OF COLD STEEL IN THY HAND AGAIN. COME, BALDER, TAKE THY SWORD THAT WE MAY ENGAGE IN SPORT.

DOST THOU NOT UNDERSTAND, FANDRAL?

AWAY WITH THY BLADE! NOT E'EN IN *JEST* WILL I ACCEPT THE WAYS OF THE WARRIOR! NE'ER AGAIN WILL I DISPATCH A FOE TO THAT *HATED* SHADOW-REALM IN WHICH I DID WANDER!

SPAK!

AWAY!

WHAT IS'T I SAID, THUNDER GOD, TO SO INFURIATE NOBLE BALDER?

CALM THYSELF, FANDRAL. THOU ART INNOCENT OF INSULT. SOMETHING BOTHERS BRAVE BALDER, AND AS ONE CLOSE TO HIM, I SHALL SEE TO THE CAUSE OF HIS ANGER.

THOR FOLLOWS THE SWIFTLY RECEDING FIGURE OUT OF THE HUSHED PALACE--

--AND ONTO ASGARD'S AWE-SOME AVENUE OF HEROES.

BALDER...I WOULD HAVE WORDS WITH THEE, FRIEND.

FORGIVE MINE ACTIONS, THOR, BUT I BE SORELY TROUBLED. FOR NIGH UNTO A YEAR I HOVERED TWIXT LIFE AND DEATH--ODIN'S PAWN IN HIS GAMBIT TO PREVENT RAGNAROK. IN THAT TIME, MY SPIRIT PASSED AMONG THE DARK HALLS OF VALHALLA...

...*VALHALLA*, ONCE THE WONDROUS REALM OUR WARRIORS LONGED FOR SHOULD BATTLE CLAIM THEIR LIVES. BUT OF LATE, 'TIS A FOREBODING DOMAIN--

--SINCE THE DEATH GODDESS *HELA* DID CONQUER IT.

THIS WE ALL DO KNOW, BRAVE ONE. BUT HOW HAS IT AFFECTED THEE?

I HAVE SEEN THE *AGONY* OF THOSE SOULS WHO DO LIVE THERE. I HAVE FELT THEIR PAIN AS *NONE* LIVING COULD, AND IT HATH CHANGED ME... E'EN PHYSICALLY I BE DIFFERENT.

PHYSICALLY? BUT THY BODY DOTH BE THE SAME... HOW--

NAY.

NOTICE MY HAIR... ONCE 'TWAS BROWN.

NOW... IT BE *WHITE*.

THOR, IS THERE STILL A PLACE IN WARLIKE ASGARD FOR ONE NO LONGER A WARRIOR?

FOR HIM WHO HATH SAVED MY LIFE TIMES UNCOUNTABLE... FOR HIM WHO BE A BROTHER TO ME BEYOND KINDRED FLESH--THERE SHALL ALWAYS BE A PLACE AMONG ASGARD'S FINEST. AND NOW I LEAVE THEE TO THY SOLITUDE.

THY WORDS DO GLADDEN MY HEART THOR. I SHALL NOT FORGET THEM, MY BROTHER.

I SUSPECTED LITTLE OF THE DEPTH OF BALDER'S DILEMMA. TRULY HE BE A CHANGED GOD. I FEAR FOR HIM IN THE COMING DAYS.

THOR, MY LOVE, DIDST THOU FIND BALDER?

AYE, MILADY *SIF*, WE DID DISCUSS AT LENGTH HIS -- CONDITION.

AND WHAT OF HIS CONDITION?

I KNOW ONLY THAT HE *STRUGGLES* WITH HIS VERY NATURE. AND WHEN THE BATTLE BE OVER... I WONDER WHAT BALDER WILL HAVE BECOME.

BUT ENOW-- WHAT OF US, MILADY? WHAT OF THE LIFE WE HAVE OFT SPOKEN OF--TOGETHER?

WITH ASGARD SO TRANQUIL... WITH NO FOES MASSING AT OUR BORDERS, PERHAPS 'TIS TIME WE SPOKE OF OUR BETROTHAL.

AYE... MARRIAGE.

ALWAYS IN THE PAST, DUTY TO THY FATHER AND THE REALM HATH PREVENTED OUR UNION. WE HAVE WAITED LONG, BELOVED.

AYE, ***TOO LONG,*** BUT THERE BE NOTHING TO KEEP US APART NOW, SIF.

AYE, LONG HAVE I GAZED AT THY VACANT PALACE WHILST THOU WERT AWAY...ANTICIPATING THE DAY WE COULD SETTLE THEREIN AND FULFILL THE PROMISE OF OUR LOVE.

BUT WE MAY SPEAK OF SUCH MATTERS IN THE DAYS TO COME. NOW THERE BE THINGS TO SHARE IN WAYS BEYOND WORDS.

*LATER, THEY PART, AS THOR RETURNS TO HIS OWN CASTLE, **THRUDVANGAR**...*

THE LADY SIF STARES LONGINGLY AFTER HIM...

*...WONDERING WHEN SHE WILL AT LAST CALL THE SON OF ODIN-- **HUSBAND.***

SOON, IN THOR'S BEDCHAMBER...

STRANGE...SIF SPEAKS AS IF SHE DESIRES NE'ER AGAIN TO LEAVE ASGARD. THOUGH MY LOVE FOR HER SURPASSES UNDERSTANDING-- STILL DOTH EARTH CLAIM MY AFFECTIONS, AS WELL. WHY HAST ***SHE*** NO FEELINGS FOR IT?

ISN'T HER SPIRIT NOT AS ONE WITH THAT OF THE MORTAL NURSE ***JANE FOSTER***, WHOM I ONCE DID LOVE? DID NOT SIF ONCE LEND HER OWN LIFE-FORCE TO SAVE JANE FROM DEATH?*

*THOR #236. -- JIM.

FOR MONTHS AFTER, SIF'S VERY FORM WAS SUBMERGED BENEATH A REVITALIZED JANE'S, UNTIL SHE GRASPED THE HILT OF SIF'S SWORD AND ONCE AGAIN WAS THE GODDESS GIVEN SUBSTANCE.

*THOR #249.-- J.S.

SHE HATH BEEN SIF HERE IN ASGARD E'ER SINCE, I WONDER... IS JANE FOSTER'S PERSONA TRULY GONE-- OR WILL IT BE REBORN IN THE FLESH IF SIF DOTH RETURN TO EARTH?

HOW WILL MILADY REACT WHEN I DO INFORM HER OF MINE INTENT TO DWELL AMONG THE MORTALS AGAIN?

DESPITE THE FRIVOLITY OF THE PRECEDING NINE DAYS, THE THUNDER GOD FALLS INTO A RESTLESS SLEEP...

...HIS TOSSING AND TURNING BETRAYING THE TURMOIL IN HIS HEART.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING FINDS THE AWAKENED IMMORTAL JOINED BY HIS LADY AT A ROYAL REPAST...

SIF... I DID MEAN TO MENTION THIS LAST EVENING, BUT I WISHED NOT TO SPOIL THE *MOOD*. I HAVE LEARNED OF LATE THAT MY HERITAGE BE AS MUCH ON EARTH--MIDGARD--AS IT IS HERE IN ASGARD. THUS, 'TIS MY DESIRE TO MAKE MIDGARD MY HOME.

WHAT? WHAT OF OUR PLANS... OUR *FUTURE*... OUR LIFE TOGETHER OF WHICH WE SPOKE?

ALL THAT CAN *STILL* BE OURS, MY LOVE... ON *EARTH*. WE SHALL TAKE UP RESIDENCE THERE, LIVE SECRETLY AMONG MORTALS, EVER READY TO LEAP TO THEIR DEFENSE. WE CAN STILL VISIT THE *REALM ETERNAL* WHENEVER THOU WISHES.

WHAT HOLD DOTH THAT MAD WORLD HAVE ON THEE, MY DARLING?

AS I SAID, IT IS PART OF MY HERITAGE. AND *THINE*, TOO. DOST THOU NOT FEEL THE PART OF YOU THAT BE THE FRAIL MORTAL, *JANE FOSTER*?

NO, MILORD, I--

THOR! WE BEG THY FORGIVENESS FOR THIS INTRUSION-- BUT THERE BE ADVENTURE A'BORNING!

WE HAVE DETECTED THE STIRRINGS OF THE STORM GIANTS IN NEARBY JOTUNHEIM. WE MUST BE OFF TO QUELL THEIR RUMBLINGS!

EH? THE *WARRIORS THREE!*

AYE, AND VALIANT VOLSTAGG HIMSELF SHALL TAKE CHARGE AND SPEED US 'PON OUR QUEST... BY HELPING THEE CONSUME THY NOURISHMENT.

THOR... DIDST THOU NOT HEAR? WE MUST AWAY, THE STORM GIANTS MAY--

I AM CERTAIN YE THREE CAN PREVAIL THYSELVES, FRIEND FANDRAL. FOR I BE JOURNEYING TO MIDGARD THIS DAY.

MIDGARD!?!

WHAT CAN SUCH A WORLD OFFER THEE, ODINSON? IN ASGARD THERE BE BATTLES UNENDING, SPLENDOR WITHOUT PEER, AND PLEASURES DIVINE. E'EN THE *FOOD* BE BETTER HERE! MIDGARD HATH NOTHING TO COMPARE.

'TIS TRUE THAT ASGARD BE A PLACE OF WONDERS-- BUT SO IS EARTH. IN THE YEARS I DWELT AMONG MORTALS AS THE LAME DR. BLAKE, I CAME TO SHARE THEIR PAIN AND FRAILTIES... TO REJOICE IN A LIFE NOT LIVED SOLELY IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE.

YE MUST UNDERSTAND THERE BE AS MUCH PRIDE AND SATISFACTION IN HEALING THE SICK AS THERE BE IN THE CONQUEST OF STORM GIANTS OR TROLLS.

I AM SCION OF ASGARD-- YET PART OF ME IS *EVER* WITH MIDGARD, THOUGH MORTALS DO NOT WORSHIP US AS GODS ANY LONGER...

...TIS NOT REASON ENOW TO ABANDON THEM IN THEIR OWN NEVER ENDING STRUGGLES.

AND WHAT OF SIF? WHAT OF OUR LIVES... DOES THY LOVE FOR MORTALS LEAVE NO ROOM FOR *ME*? WHAT IF RESIDENCE IN MIDGARD BE NOT TO MY LIKING?

FIRST, THOU MUST ALLOW ME TO ENDEAVOR TO *MAKE IT* TO THY LIKING. LET ME RE-ESTABLISH MINE IDENTITY ON MIDGARD, FIND US A PLACE OF DWELLING...

...THEN I SHALL *RETURN* FOR THEE.

I...

SIF... I CRAVE THY LOVE AS THE BREATH OF LIFE ITSELF. DO NOT TURN THY BACK ON ME. I WANT THEE WITH ME-- AT MY SIDE ON MIDGARD. WILT THOU GIVE ME THIS CHANCE, BELOVED?

GET THEE TO MIDGARD, THOR. WHEN THOU RETURN, I- I WILL BE WAITING.

THEY EMBRACE WITH A FERVOR ONLY LOVERS MAY KNOW, AS THE WARRIORS THREE EXIT THOR'S ABODE, WITH MUCH TO THINK UPON THIS DAY.

SOON, IN THE REGAL THRONEROOM OF THE LORD OF ASGARD...

THOU HAST LEAVE TO APPROACH THE PRESENCE, MY SON.

FATHER, WILT THOU GRANT ME A BOON?

IF IT BE WITHIN THE POWER OF ODIN... IT IS *THINE.*

I REQUEST A LEAVE OF ABSENCE THAT I MAY PURSUE MY DESTINY ON MIDGARD BELOW, FOR SUCH TIME AS I SEE FIT.

THOR... FOR THY PART IN THE SAVING OF IMMORTAL ASGARD... THOU HAST EARNED THE RIGHT TO COME AND GO AS THOU DOST CHOOSE. NE'ER AGAIN SHALL I DENY THEE THY FREEDOM.

I THANK THEE, FATHER. THEN, BY THY LEAVE AND THAT OF THY WIFE, ***QUEEN FRIGGA***, I DO HIE ME FORTH TO MIDGARD. MILADY, I AM EVER THY SERVANT.

GO WITH MY BLESSING, THOR.

TO EARTH, I JOURNEY--THERE TO FACE WHATE'ER CHALLENGES FATE HATH IN STORE FOR ME. MY FATHER... MY QUEEN...

...FAREWELL!

INSTANTLY, THOR'S WHIRLING MALLET TRANSPORTS HIM FROM THE GLEAMING SPIRES OF THE REALM ETERNAL...

...TO THE SOOTY SMOKESTACKS OF EARTH.

ONCE MORE TO THE MORTALS' GREATEST CITY--***NEW YORK***--DO I COME.

THERE, BELOW ME, A CITY OF STATUS AND SQUALOR...A PLACE OF SOARING HOPES AND SHATTERED DREAMS.

...A PLACE I WILL ONCE AGAIN MAKE MY ***HOME.***

SOON, I WILL NOT BE A GOD AMONGST GODS, RESPECTED AND FEARED AS THE HEIR TO A GREAT THRONE--BUT MERELY A SINGLE SOUL AMONGST EIGHT MILLION OTHERS, QUIETLY GOING ABOUT MINE AFFAIRS.

AND THOUGH IT DOTH CONFOUND THOSE LEFT BEHIND... I DO RELISH EACH AND EVERY ***MOMENT*** OF IT.

NOW, MUST I TAP MJOLNIR ONCE 'PON THE ROOF...

...BRINGING ABOUT THE CHANGE DIVINE ODIN HAST DECREED MUST OCCUR...

...AND EXIT THE GOD OF THUNDER--ENTER THE LAME PHYSICIAN, ***DR. DONALD BLAKE.***

IT SEEMS SO LONG SINCE I WANDERED THE STREETS LIKE THIS.*I THINK I'LL JUST WALK A BIT AND FEEL THE EBB AND FLOW OF HUMANITY ONCE AGAIN.

*ISH#267 TO BE EXACT. --JIM.

THEN, AFTER AN INVIGORATING, IF SOMEWHAT AIMLESS STROLL...

NOW, IT'S DOWN TO BUSINESS. I'LL HAVE TO GET MYSELF AN APARTMENT AND RE-ESTABLISH MY PRACTICE, ALL OF WHICH IS GOING TO TAKE--

--MONEY.

BANK

INSIDE...

WON'T BE MUCH LONGER NOW, AND I'LL HAVE THE MONEY I MADE YEARS AGO WHEN I HAD A LUCRATIVE PRACTICE--

--THAT IS BEFORE BEING THOR TOOK UP SO MUCH TIME THAT. I LOST IT.

DR. BLAKE, OUR RECORDS SHOW IT'S BEEN SEVERAL YEARS SINCE ANY FUNDS WERE EITHER DEPOSITED OR WITHDRAWN FROM YOUR ACCOUNT, SO YOU'LL NEED AUTHORIZATION TO DO SO. PLEASE SEE MS. PRUNZE, ONE OF OUR INVESTIGATORS.

SURE. RIGHT AWAY.

HAVE A SEAT, DR. BLAKE. THIS SHOULDN'T TAKE LONG. DO YOU HAVE ANY REFERENCES... PEOPLE WHO MIGHT VOUCH FOR YOU SHOULD WE FIND IT NECESSARY TO CONSULT THEM ABOUT YOUR WHEREABOUTS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS?

WILL TONY STARK DO, MA'AM?

STARK-- THE HEAD OF STARK INTERNATIONAL INDUSTRIES ON LONG ISLAND? YOU CAN'T GET MUCH MORE REPUTABLE THAN THAT. WAS HE A PATIENT AT ANY TIME?

JUST A GOOD FRIEND.

I SEE. WELL, LET'S-- WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE TROUBLE? EVERYTHING'S SHAKING-- THE WHOLE BANK'S QUIVERING!

OVER THERE-- LOOK!

RWOOM!

SOME SORT OF GIGANTIC CONE-- IT'S BURSTING THROUGH THE WALL!

MY, MY, HAVE I CAUSED SO MUCH ACTIVITY BY SIMPLY ENTERING THE BANK? IT LOOKS AS IF I MAY HAVE A PANIC ON MY HANDS.

I'LL GET TO THAT IN A MOMENT. BUT I DO HATE FEELING STIFLED, SO ALLOW ME TO IMPRISON YOU BEHIND THESE PERFECTLY FORMED PARALLEL LINES...ONLY A PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE, I ASSURE YOU.

WHAT SORT OF STRANGE POWER CAN THIS MAN HAVE? ALL HE DOES IS GESTURE AND WALLS COLLAPSE AND BARS GO UP.

LET US OUT OF HERE!

WHAT IS ALL THIS COMMOTION OUT HERE?! THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE A BANK, NOT A BALLPARK!

PRIVATE

LET ME INTRODUCE MYSELF-- I'M--

EARN 5% INT.

AARON VERNE! WHAT THE DEVIL ARE YOU DOING HERE? I FIRED YOU!

PRECISELY, MR. HUNNICUT.

AND NOW I'VE COME BACK.

WHAT ARE YOU TALK--AWP! I'M BEING WRAPPED IN CIRCLES?!

I'M TALKING ABOUT A WITHDRAWAL, SIR.

HOW NICE. THE VAULT'S *OPEN*-- AS IF YOU'D BEEN EXPECTING ME. COME NOW, DON'T LOOK LIKE THAT. THIS ISN'T A CRIME-- IT'S MERE *COMPENSATION*, FOR THE YEARS OF AGGRAVATION YOU'VE GIVEN ME, HUNNICUT.

I SUPPOSE I'M GOING TO HAVE TO TELL YOU HOW I'VE COME BY THESE EXTRAORDINARY POWERS, YOU SEEM SO INTERESTED.

YOU'RE AWARE OF MY ALL-CONSUMING INTEREST IN MATHEMATICS--SPECIFICALLY *GEOMETRY*. BUT I NEVER HAD THE FUNDS TO PURSUE ITS STUDY IN COLLEGE, AND SO, UNABLE TO GET A JOB IN MY CHOSEN FIELD I'VE LIVED A LIFE OF MEANINGLESS, MENIAL JOBS.

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$(x^2-1)(x^2+5x+6 = 0$

"AND TODAY YOU *FIRED* ME FROM THIS ONE-- BECAUSE OF MY PASSION. YOU SAID MY MIND WAS NEVER ON MY 'WORK'.

"I WENT HOME DAZED, DISILLUSIONED... AND AS ALWAYS SOUGHT MY RELEASE IN THE REALM OF IDEAS--

"--IN THE MIND, WHERE FLAWLESS GEOMETRIC SHAPES FLOATED BEFORE ME, BECKONING WITH THEIR PERFECTION.

"AND IN MY FLIGHT OF FANCY, I REACHED OUT FOR THEM, AND SUDDENLY--

"--THEY WERE REAL! AND ALL BECAUSE I *BELIEVED* IN WHAT I SAW SO STRONGLY.

"IN SOME STRANGE WAY, MY MIND HAD TAPPED INTO A UNIVERSAL EQUATION--AND WHAT I HAD CONCEIVED THEN ASSUMED THREE-DIMENSIONAL REALITY.

AND EVEN IF YOU DENY MY STORY-- YOU MUST ACCEPT THE EVIDENCE OF YOUR BEADY LITTLE EYES, HUNNICUT.

THE EMPTINESS OF YOUR PRECIOUS VAULT WILL ATTEST TO MY EXISTENCE, MUCH TO YOUR REGRET.

FAREWELL. YOU HAVE BEEN PRIVILEGED TO BE IMPRISONED BY LOCUS, THE GEOMETRIC MAN. I HAVE DECIDED UPON THAT NAME FOR LOCUS IS A FOCAL POINT FOR GEOMETRIC CONFIGURATION-- AND THAT IS WHAT I HAVE BECOME.

WHAT A CORN-BALL!

THERE'S VERY LITTLE DR. DON BLAKE CAN DO NOW. SO, WHILE THE CROWD'S ATTENTION IS DIVERTED--

--IT'S TIME TO BRING A CERTAIN NORSE GOD INTO THE FRAY.

WHILE OUTSIDE...

AHH, I NOTE THE LOCAL CONSTABULARY HAS BEEN CALLED. PLEASE DON'T REFER TO THIS IMPECCABLY CONCEIVED RECTANGLE AS A "BAG!" YOU DO LOCUS A GRAVE DISSERVICE.

JUST DROP THE BAG AND DON'T MAKE ANY TROUBLE.

AND NOW IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I SHOULD--

HOLD, MORTAL! YOU MUST PAY FOR THY CRIMINAL ACTS!

WHAT-- *THOR?!*

YOU'RE ONE OF THOSE SO-CALLED HEROES I'VE READ ABOUT...THE ONE WHOSE GIMMICK IS TO PRETEND YOU'RE SOME SORT OF MYTHOLOGICAL GOD, *HOKUM!* *CLAPTRAP!*

THOU WOULD DO WELL TO CEASE THY BABBLE ERE I GROW ANNOYED!

ANNOYED...DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT YOU'RE DEALING WITH, YOU MUSCLE-BOUND MISANTHROPE? I AM THE POWER OF *MATHEMATICS UNLEASHED!* I'VE SPENT A LIFETIME IN THE CONTEMPLATION OF GEOMETRIC FORM AND FUNCTION...

...AND MY *BELIEF* IN THOSE CONCEPTS ALLOWS ME TO GIVE THEM REALITY ON THIS PLANE, AND YOU WOULD CHALLENGE THAT WITH A DIME-STORE HAMMER?!

PERHAPS A SMALL DEMONSTRATION IS IN ORDER TO REINFORCE MY STATEMENTS.

WHOOM!

UGGHH!

RETURN, LOCUS THY COWARDLY ATTACK HATH BUT SPARKED THE BATTLE-- NOT ENDED IT!

REGRETFULLY, EXPEDIENCY MAKES COWARDS OF US ALL. SO, I'LL FLEE WITH MY ILL-GOTTEN GAINS AND SUFFER THE PANGS OF CONSCIENCE PRIVATELY.

OPEN FIRE! HE'S TAKIN' OFF ON SOME KINDA RISING PLATFORM! BUT DON'T SHOOT TO KILL-- JUST BRING 'IM DOWN!

POLICE

24

LOOK-- HE'S FORMING SOMETHING ELSE OUTTA THIN AIR-- A CIRCLE OR SOMETHIN'!

A *PARABOLIC BARRIER* TO BE EXACT, IGNORAMUS...ONE BROUGHT INTO BEING BY THE POWER OF MY MIND-- BACKED BY MY WILL--

PWING!

PWING!

--THEREFORE INVULNERABLE.

HOLD YOUR FIRE! OUR BULLETS ARE BOUNCIN' BACK AT US! WE'VE ALREADY WINGED ONE MAN, AND WE COULD HIT A BYSTANDER!

HIS MEEK APPEARANCE HATH DISTRACTED ME-- LEAVING ME OPEN FOR THE INITIAL BLOW.

BUT NO LONGER SHALL THOR RESTRAIN HIS *WRATH!*

NOW SHALL LOCUS BE LAID LOW AND HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR HIS DEEDS!

SPARE ME YOUR--

--*WHAT!* HIS HAMMER-- IT MUST HAVE STRUCK MY RISING CYLINDER-- UPSETTING IT!

BTOK!

THAT MEDDLING FOOL! I WAS ABLE TO STABILIZE THE CYLINDER BEFORE FALLING--BUT I FELT A SUDDEN *PAIN* WHEN IT WAS STRUCK!

NO MATTER, IT'S PASSED NOW AND I CAN MOUNT AN OFFENSIVE.

I'VE HEARD STORIES ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH THAT SILLY CROQUET MALLET.

LET'S TEST YOUR METTLE, THUNDER GOD--AGAINST A SKY FULL OF LETHAL, LOCUS-SPAWNED SPHERES!

DO THY WORST! MIGHTY MJOLNIR BE MORE THAN EQUAL TO THE TASK!

AMAZING! FROM WHAT SOURCE DOES THAT HAMMER RECEIVE ITS POWER? I REFUSE TO ACCEPT THAT NONSENSE I'VE HEARD ABOUT SOME SILLY *MAGIC* OR ENCHANTMENT.

YET WHAT OTHER EXPLANATION SUFFICES? HOW CAN--

SPAK!

--UGGHT! PAIN--WORSE THAN BEFORE--EACH TIME HE STRIKES A SPHERE, I CAN FEEL IT. WHAT I'M CREATING ARE THOUGHT-CONSTRUCTS, AND SOMEHOW THE LINK THEY HAVE WITH MY MIND...

...ALSO PRODUCES *FEEDBACK!* MY BRAIN--IT'S ON FIRE!

THERE BE TOO MANY TO CONTEND WITH. NO LONGER IS THERE ROOM TO SWING MY HAMMER. I BE FORCED EARTHWARD!

THE PAIN--SUBSIDING.

PERHAPS YOU WOULD CARE TO AGAIN EQUATE YOUR HAMMER'S WORTH WITH THE CHALLENGE BEFORE IT. IT SHOULD PROVE MORE AMUSING THE SECOND TIME.

NOW THOU DOST SCOFF AT ME, VILLAIN?!

HAVE AT THEE!

EXCELLENT. I'D HOPED TO SEPARATE YOU FROM THIS CARPENTER'S TOOL WHICH SEEMS SO MUCH A PART OF YOUR STRENGTH.

NOW THAT YOU'VE RELEASED THE ARCHAIC THING AGAIN-- A FAST-FORMING *POLYHEDRON* PLACED AROUND IT...

...AS WELL AS ONE ENCASING ITS OWNER, SHOULD MAKE THE SEPARATION COMPLETE AND PERMANENT.

IT'S NOT WORKING! THE HAMMER'S RETURN IS TOO SWIFT-- AND THE PAIN'S COMING BACK WITH EACH BARRIER BROKEN.

I MUST DISSIPATE THESE NON-ESSENTIALS AND CONCENTRATE FULLY ON MAINTAINING THE POLYHEDRON SURROUNDING THOR.

NEVER! 'TIS DECREED THAT THE HAMMER OF THOR *MUST EVER* RETURN TO HIS HAND WHATE'ER THE OBSTACLES BARRING ITS PATH.

THEN I SHALL CREATE ADDITIONAL OBSTRUCTIONS TO ENSURE THE DOWNFALL OF YOUR SILLY "DECREE."

MJOLNIR... IT MUST BE IN MY HAND ERE SIXTY SECONDS HATH ELAPSED-- ELSE I ASSUME THE MORTAL IDENTITY OF DON BLAKE... AND HELPLESSNESS.

TO YOUR MASTER, *MJOLNIR*, THE BOND 'TWIXT US BE GREATER THAN ANY FORCE MAY O'ERCOME. BY THE COMMAND OF DIVINE ODIN--TO MY HAND MY HAMMER!

TO MY HAND!

THE PRESSURE--INCREDIBLE! BUT NO SUPERSTITIOUS SIMPLETON CAN BREACH WALLS OF APPLIED GEOMETRIC PERFECTION! MATHEMATICAL LAW WHICH BINDS ALL CREATION--

--IS MINE TO COMMAND, BY EUCLID--I CANNOT FAIL!

THE MINUTE SOON WILL END, AND MY HAMMER WILL BECOME BUT THE LAME DOCTOR'S WALKING STICK.

I MUST GRASP ITS HANDLE--THERE BE TIME FOR NO DELAY!

MJOLNIR--THOU ART MINE! COME TO THOR, MY MALLET--TO THOR!

THERE--IT PASSES IRRESISTIBLY THROUGH THE WALL! 'TIS MINE AT LAST!

ARRR! CAN'T SUSTAIN THE PRISON--PRESSURE IS TOO MUCH! MUST CEASE STRUGGLING OR I'LL BLACK OUT!

I BE *FREE!* THE RESTRAINING ENCLOSURE HATH VANISHED!

BUT WHAT NEW VILLAINY IS NOW AFOOT?

THE *FIEND!* HE HATH IMPRISONED AN INNOCENT WOMAN IN SOME CURSED SPHERE.

HELP ME--PLEASE!

YOU MAY HAVE WON A SKIRMISH, THOR-- BUT I SHALL PREVAIL. NOW DROP THAT HAMMER OF YOURS, OR I'LL CONTRACT THE SPHERE--*KILLING* THIS PERSON.

I SAID DROP THE HAMMER, MY DIM-WITTED FRIEND. I AM NOT GIVEN TO REPEATING MYSELF.

THERE BE NO CHOICE. I DARE NOT RISK A RESCUE FROM THIS DISTANCE.

VERY WELL, MADMAN, THOR SHALL ACCEDE TO THY DEMAND. MY HAMMER BE PLACED 'PON THE GROUND. BUT BE WARNED... THERE BE FORCES AT WORK WITHIN IT BEYOND THY KEN.

AND I INTEND TO DISCOVER *PRECISELY* WHAT THOSE FORCES ARE! BUT FIRST, I MUST HAVE THE MALLET IN MY POSSESSION.

YOU STROVE MIGHTILY TO ENSURE THE HAMMER WAS IN YOUR HAND.

HOLDING IT MUST HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH ITS POWER. AND NOW THAT I'VE GRASPED IT-- I'LL ANALYZE ITS *SECRET*... PUT IT UNDER MY CON--

--NO! THE INSTANT I TOUCHED IT, THE HAMMER BEGAN FALLING AS IF IT WEIGHS TONS!

AND I'M FALLING WITH IT!

STARTLED--THE TELLER'S ALL-IMPORTANT MIND-LINK WITH HIS CYLINDER AND SPHERE VANISH. AND AS BOTH FIGURES TOPPLE, AN ANXIOUS THOR IS FORCED TO DECIDE WHICH TO RESCUE...THE LADY OR THE LOCUS.

LET THY FEARS DISPEL, WOMAN. I HAVE THEE!

BUT WHAT HAPPENED?

BWUMP!

LOCUS WAS UNAWARE OF THE REST OF MJOLNIR'S ODIN-SPAWNED ENCHANT-MENT...ALTHOUGH MY HAMMER MAY BE LIFTED BY MIND CONSTRUCTS OR MACHINES--

--NO *LIVING BEING* MAY HEFT IT BY STRENGTH OF ARM SAVE THOR HIMSELF. 'TIS AS MUCH PART OF MY HAMMER'S MAGIC AS ITS IN-EVITABLE RETURN TO ITS MASTER WHEN THROWN.

LOCUS' FAILURE TO ACCEPT SOMETHING BEYOND REASON OR COMPUTATION WAS HIS UNDOING.

NOW STAND YE BACK, FOR THERE BE ONE FINAL DEED BEFORE ME.

YOU HEARD THE MAN. KEEP OUT OF HIS WAY.

LOCUS WAS HURT IN HIS FALL. AND THOUGH HE IS ENEMY TO THOR--STILL SHALL HE RECEIVE AID FOR HIS INJURIES.

MOMENTS LATER...

HOLD IT, PAL, WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU--

I'M A MEDICAL DOCTOR--SUMMONED BY THOR TO ASSIST THAT MAN OVER THERE.

ALL RIGHT. GOWAN THROUGH.

HOW'S HE LOOK, DOC?

WELL, HE'S GOT A BROKEN COLLARBONE, AND HIS PUPIL DILATION INDICATES A SLIGHT CONCUSSION. BUT HE'LL MAKE IT.

HERE COMES THE AMBULANCE. THEY'LL TAKE IT FROM HERE. YOU CAN RIDE WITH THEM TO THE HOSPITAL IF YOU LIKE.

AMBULANCE

OKAY. LET'S PUT HIM ON THE STRETCHER.

SO, THOR'S RESPONSIBILITY TO HUMANITY IN THIS MATTER IS NOW OVER. WHILE DR. BLAKE'S TASK AS A HEALER OF MEN...

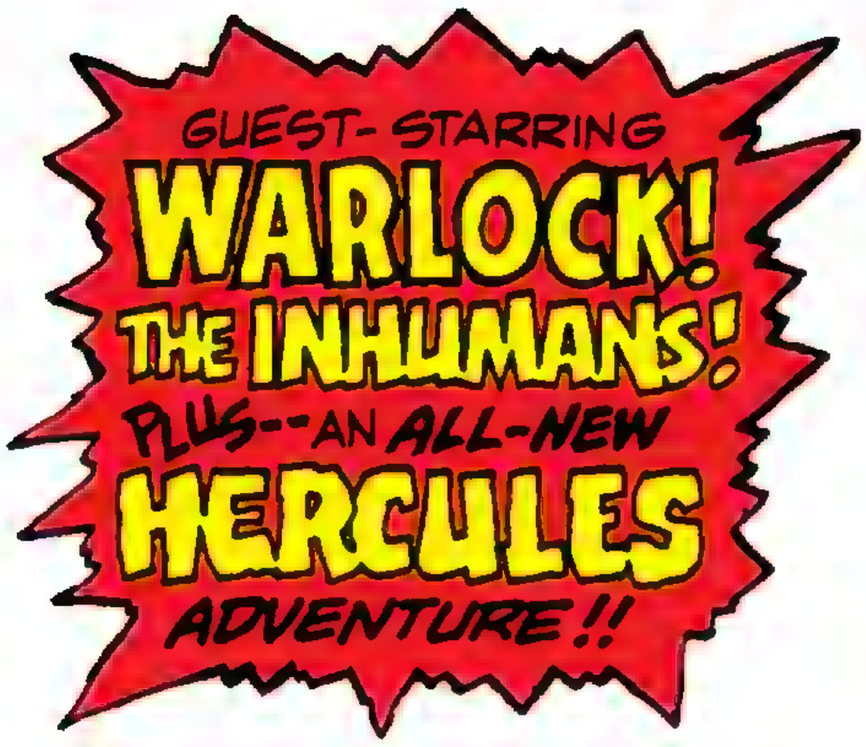
POLICE

...HAS ONLY BEGUN.

NEXT: ***THE MIRACLE OF STORMS!***

HERCULES

Thor's Grecian comrade Hercules starred in two rare solo stories published in the reprint title *Marvel Treasury Edition*.



Marvel Treasury Edition #24, 1979
"Welcome to the Hotel Macedonia"

Marvel Treasury Edition #26, 1980
"At the Sign of the Lion"

Writer: Jo Duffy

Pencilers: Ricardo Villamonte (*Marvel Treasury Edition* No. 24)
Ken Landgraf (*Marvel Treasury Edition* No. 26)

Inkers/Finishers: Ricardo Villamonte (*Marvel Treasury Edition* No. 24)
George Pérez (*Marvel Treasury Edition* No. 26)

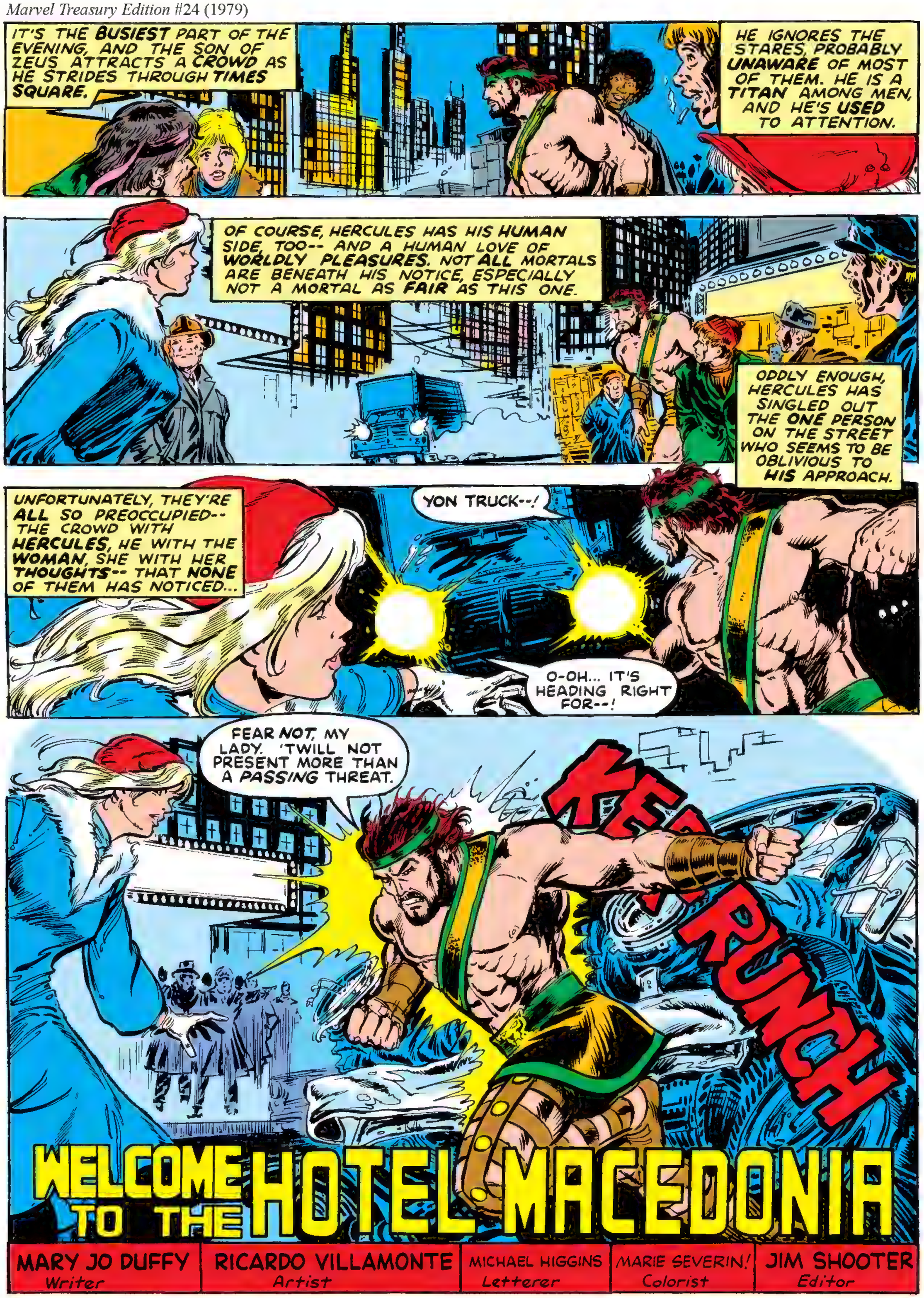
Letterer: Michael Higgins (*Marvel Treasury Edition* Nos. 24, 26)

Colorists: Marie Severin (*Marvel Treasury Edition* No. 24)
Glynis Wein (*Marvel Treasury Edition* No. 26)

Editor: Jim Shooter

Art & Color Reconstruction: Tom Mullin

Marvel Treasury Edition #24 (1979)


IT'S THE BUSIEST PART OF THE EVENING, AND THE SON OF ZEUS ATTRACTS A CROWD AS HE STRIDES THROUGH TIMES SQUARE.
HE IGNORES THE STARES, PROBABLY UNAWARE OF MOST OF THEM. HE IS A TITAN AMONG MEN, AND HE'S USED TO ATTENTION.
OF COURSE, HERCULES HAS HIS HUMAN SIDE, TOO-- AND A HUMAN LOVE OF WORLDLY PLEASURES. NOT ALL MORTALS ARE BENEATH HIS NOTICE, ESPECIALLY NOT A MORTAL AS FAIR AS THIS ONE.
ODDLY ENOUGH, HERCULES HAS SINGLED OUT THE ONE PERSON ON THE STREET WHO SEEMS TO BE OBLIVIOUS TO HIS APPROACH.
UNFORTUNATELY, THEY'RE ALL SO PREOCCUPIED-- THE CROWD WITH HERCULES, HE WITH THE WOMAN, SHE WITH HER THOUGHTS-- THAT NONE OF THEM HAS NOTICED...
YON TRUCK--!
O-OH... IT'S HEADING RIGHT FOR--!
FEAR NOT, MY LADY. 'TWILL NOT PRESENT MORE THAN A PASSING THREAT.
KER-RUNCH!
WELCOME TO THE HOTEL MACEDONIA
MARY JO DUFFY Writer
RICARDO VILLAMONTE Artist
MICHAEL HIGGINS Letterer
MARIE SEVERIN! Colorist
JIM SHOOTER Editor

YOU SAVED MY *LIFE*. HOW CAN I EVER *REPAY* YOU?

HERCULES NEEDS NO PAYMENT, MY LADY. 'TWAS *HONOR* ENOUGH TO STRIKE A BLOW IN THY *DEFENSE*. I FIGHT FOR THE *GLORY* OF THE COMBAT.

'GLORY OF THE COMBAT,' HE SAYS. MY *POOR TRUCK!*

THOU SEEMST *UNSTEADY* AFTER THY NARROW ESCAPE. SAY BUT THE WORD, AND I SHALL CONDUCT THEE *SAFELY* TO THY PLACE OF *DWELLING*.

YES, I... DO FEEL A BIT FAINT.

*CONVERSATION IS BRIEF AND RAMBLING AS HERCULES ESCORTS HIS COMPANION THROUGH THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF INCREASINGLY **DESERTED STREETS**. SHE DOESN'T SEEM TO **WANT** TO TALK, AND AFTER A FEW **ATTEMPTS**, HERCULES STOPS TRYING TO DRAW HER OUT.*

*HER EXPERIENCE HAS PROBABLY LEFT HER **SHAKEN**, AND **HE** HAS WORDS ENOUGH FOR THEM **BOTH**.*

HOTEL

'TIS *PASSING* STRANGE... SURELY A LODGING OF *THIS* TYPE IS BENEATH THINE ELEGANCE.

HOTEL

IT... SUITS ME.

THEN I'VE *NO MORE* TO SAY ON'T. LET US PROCURE THY *KEY* AND--

--*ZOUNDS!* NO DESK CLERK? HERE'S A MYSTERY. SURELY *SOMEONE* GUARDS EVEN SUCH PORTALS AS *THESE* DURING THE NIGHT!

NOT IN *THIS* HOTEL, SON OF ZEUS!

YOU?!?

BUT... THIS *OLYMPIAN TEMPLE*... THE TUMBLE-DOWN MORTAL DWELLING PLACE--?!

YES, HERCULES, *I*-- HIPPOLYTA, *QUEEN OF THE AMAZONS*! SHE WHOM YOU *SPURNED* YEARS AGONE... SHE WHO SWORE *REVENGE* 'GAINST YOU!

WAS BUT A *FACADE*, AS THE ELEGANT LADY YOU SO GALLANTLY RESCUED WAS *MY* FACADE.

IT WAS MY *PLAN* FOR YOU TO SAVE ME WHEN I 'ENDANGERED' MYSELF THAT I MIGHT LURE YOU *HERE*--

--TO ONE OF THE *TOUCHSTONES* OF IMMORTAL OLYMPUS ON THIS MORTAL EARTH NOW THAT YOU'RE HERE AND ALL *ILLUSIONS* HAVE BEEN STRIPPED AWAY--

I'LL *HAVE* MY REVENGE.

WHUD

CHAK

CRACK

NE'ER BEFORE HADST THOU SUCH *STRENGTH*, HIPPOLYTA...

I'VE DONNED THE *GAUNTLETS OF ARES*, THE GOD OF WAR! IN *COMBAT*, THEY INCREASE MY *STRENGTH* MANY TIMES OVER.

DON WHAT THOU *WILT*, BASE QUEEN. HERCULES IS *STILL* PRINCE OF POWER, AND HE'LL NOT BOW TO THEE OR ANY *OTHER*.

THE *LION OF OLYMPUS* WILL FACE THEE--BE THEE WOMAN OR *QUEEN*, GODDESS OR *DEMONESS*-- AND HE WILL SMITE THEE *DOWN!*

NO! *I* SHALL HUMBLE *YOU*. I'LL HAVE MY REVENGE--I *MUST!*

KRUD

THE PAIR FIGHTS ON, **EVENLY MATCHED** CARELESS OF THE **HAVOC** THEY WREAK UPON THEIR SURROUNDINGS.

WHUNK

BUT WHEN ENCHANTMENT IS GIVEN A **PHYSICAL** FORM, THAT FORM CAN BE **DAMAGED**...

FALL, HERCULES!

KRAK

BOOM

...SO THAT IT IS NOT *HERCULES* THAT FALLS--

--BUT THE PILLAR.

NO--!

IT'S COMING DOWN RIGHT ON *TOP* OF ME!

BRUUMMBB

What--?

STAND THOU *AWAY*, O QUEEN. THE SON OF ZEUS WILL *STOP* THE PILLAR'S FALL.

FLEE NOW, AND QUICKLY! I FEAR 'TIS A WEIGHT THAT CANNOT LONG BE BORNE BY MAN OR *DEMI-GOD*.

BUT *THIS* PILLAR IS FAR MORE-- PART OF THE BARRIER THAT SEPARATES *MYTH* FROM *REALITY*-- AND IT BEARS THE WEIGHT OF A LEGEND *CENTURIES OLD*.

AND HIPPOLYTA? SHE NEEDS ONLY STAND BY AND *WATCH* HER DREAMS FULFILLED AS HERCULES *FALLS*, ONCE AND FOR ALL.

IF THE COLUMN WERE ONLY *MARBLE*, SUPPORTING A MATERIAL ROOF, HERCULES COULD SHRUG IT *AWAY* AS AN ORDINARY MAN WOULD A *TREE BRANCH*.

BUT...

NO... I *WANTED* YOU DEFEATED, BUT NOT *THIS* WAY.

I *CAN'T* LET YOU FALL VICTIM TO YOUR OWN *FOOLISH CHIVALRY.* YOU REALLY *DID* SAVE MY LIFE!

WOMAN, THERE'S NO *TIME* FOR MUSING AND SPEECHES. *ATLAS HIMSELF* COULD NOT LONG HOLD THIS WEIGHT!

GO NOW!

NO, I *WON'T* OWE YOU MY LIFE! THE GAUNTLETS ARE OF *NO USE* TO ME SINCE WE'VE STOPPED FIGHTING, BUT MY *STRENGTH ALONE* MAY YET BE ENOUGH!

=Ung=

INCH BY WAVERING INCH, THE HUGE STONE COLUMN BEGINS TO MOVE. PRECARIOUSLY... SUPPORTED BY THEIR COMBINED STRENGTH... IT SHIFTS--

WE'RE DOING IT, MILADY--WE'RE *DOING IT!*

--AND IS CAST ASIDE!

HIPPOLYTA, WE'RE STRONGER AS *ALLIES* THAN AS FOES--

--LET US *END* THIS FOOLISH *QUARREL!* HERE'S MY HAND ON'T!

DO YOU THINK I'D TAKE YOUR *HAND* WHEN I CANNOT HAVE YOUR *HEART?* *BEGONE!*

I OWED YOU A *DEBT,* HERCULES, AND THAT DEBT HAS BEEN *PAID.* WE SHALL MEET AGAIN, AND ON *THAT DAY,* HIPPOLYTA SHALL HAVE HER *REVENGE.*

SWAT

AS THOU *WISHEST,* FAIR QUEEN, BUT THE PITY OF HERCULES IS THINE, FOR HATRED DOTH *SHACKLE* THEE AND SHALT HOLD THEE *PRISONER* WHERE'ER THOU ART.

E'EN IN AS FINE A TEMPLE AS *THIS.*

THE END

Stan Lee PRESENTS: WOLVERINE™ AND HERCULES™!

MARY JO DUFFY * SCRIPT
KEN LANDGRAF * PENCILS
GEORGE PÉREZ * INKS
MICHAEL HIGGINS, letters * GLYNIS WEIN, colors
JIM SHOOTER * EDITING

HIS NAME IS WOLVERINE. LOGAN TO HIS FRIENDS. RIGHT NOW, AS FAR AS HE'S CONCERNED, HE HASN'T GOT ANY.

I'M TELLING YOU, SIBYL, I'VE BEEN WATCHING THAT GUY, AND HE LOOKS LIKE TROUBLE. I DON'T THINK HE'S INTERESTED.

OH, NO? JUST *WATCH* ME.

MAN, THIS PLACE IS DEAD. I'D HAVE HAD MORE LAUGHS IN WESTCHESTER.

'CEPT THAT IF I'D STUCK AROUND, I'D PROBABLY'A HAD IT OUT WITH CYCLOPS. WE'RE GONNA TANGLE, AND SOON. IT'S BAD ENOUGH THAT A WIMP LIKE HIM IS MAKING TIME WITH JEANNIE, A WOMAN WHO OUGHTTA BE ***MINE,*** WITHOUT HAVING TO PUT UP WITH HIM AS LEADER, TOO.

MAN, HE MAKES ME ***SICK*** WITH ALL THAT KISSING UP TO THE PROFESSOR AN' TRYIN'TA MAKE US BE GOOD LITTLE X-MEN... MAYBE I SHOULD'A STAYED AN' SHOWED 'EM ***ALL*** WHAT A ***REAL*** MAN IS.

AT THE SIGN OF THE LION

ALL ALONE, HANDSOME?

WHAT'S IT TO YOU?

HOW ABOUT PASSING ME THE PEANUTS?

WHAT'S'A MATTER, SISTER, YOU ***CRIPPLED*** OR SOMETHING?

HEY, IF ***THAT'S*** THE WAY IT IS, JUST ***FORGET*** IT. YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY GUY IN HERE.

AW... LOOK, I WAS JUST KIDDIN'! COME ON BACK AN' I'LL BUY YA A DRINK.

SUDDENLY...

HO, MERRYMAKERS! LET THE REVELS BEGIN. WHAT BETTER PLACE FOR THE LION OF OLYMPUS TO CAROUSE--

--THAN UNDER THE *SIGN OF THE LIONS?*

WELL, WELL, WELL... LOOKS LIKE THE *GOOD FAIRY* DROPPED IN ON THE OLD LION'S ROCK TAVERN!

WHATTA THEM CHICKS SEE IN THAT GUY ANYWAY?

I ASKED YOU A--*HEY!* WHERE'D SHE GO?

WHY CAN'T WE GET GUYS LIKE THIS IN HERE MORE OFTEN?

GOOD FELLOW, MOVE THYSELF TO THE END OF THE BAR. THOU DOST OCCUPY THE ONLY EMPTY AREA THAT CAN ACCOMODATE HERCULES AND ALL OF HIS FAIR COMPANIONS.

SURE, TINKERBELL...

I'LL MAKE ROOM FOR THE REDHEAD, 'CAUSE SHE'S WITH ME. THE REST A' YOU CAN JUST MAKE OTHER ARRANGEMENTS.

THOU NEEDST NOT BE *CHURLISH* WHEN 'TIS SO MUCH SIMPLER--

--TO MOVE.

OW!!

WUMP

STICK IT IN YER EAR, CLOWN! I DON'T TAKE THAT KIND OF BULL FROM ANYONE. NOT FROM A TURKEY NAMED SUMMERS AN' CERTAINLY NOT FROM YOU.

CALM THYSELF, LEST THOU O'ERSTEP THY MORTAL LIMITATIONS. REVELRY AND SONG ARE BEST WHEN ***SHARED***, MY FRIEND.

WOLVERINE DON'T SHARE WHAT HE CAN FIGHT FOR.

THUD

HAVE A CARE! HERCULES DOTH BEGIN TO FIND THEE ***ANNOYING***, MORTAL! ***BEGONE!***

BAP!

ALL RIGHT, THAT ***DOES*** IT. YOU THINK YOU'RE SUCH HOT STUFF...

...LET'S SEE HOW YOU DO AGAINST ***ADAMANTIUM CLAWS!***

SNIK!

ZOUNDS!!

NOT SO TOUGH NOW, ARE YA, HERC?

GREAT ZEUS!!

STOP! STOP! YOU'RE WRECKING MY TAVERN! MY INSURANCE DOESN'T **COVER** SUPER-HEROES.

THEN 'TIS FOR HERCULES TO SEE THAT THY LANDING IS A SOFT ONE.

GANGWAY, TURKEY! COMIN' THROUGH.

HEY!!

KRAK

VERY FUNNY, **VERY** FUNNY... JUST WAIT'LL I GET MY HANDS FREE! I'M GONNA SLICE YOUR EARS OFF!

HO HO! BY THEN, FRIEND WOLVERINE, PERHAPS THOU SHALT BE IN A KINDER FRAME OF MIND.

THY PREDICAMENT IS ITSELF A SUPREME JEST! IN TRUTH, I CANNOT RECALL WHEN ANY BATTLE HAS GIVEN ME SUCH SPORT.

I...I DON'T WANNA SEE HOW THIS ENDS.

I'LL SHOW YOU *SPORT*, YOU BIG JERK!

MAYBE I CAN WRITE IT OFF UNDER *ACTS OF GODS.*

VERILY, IF THY STATURE WERE BUT THE MATCH OF THY SPIRIT, THIS WOULD BE A BATTLE OF *EPIC GRANDEUR!*

MY *STATURE*--?! WHO YOU CALLIN' *SHORT*, BUB? JUST LEMME GET MY HANDS LOOSE AN' I'LL--

--WAIT A MINUTE. YOU WANT SOMEPLACE TO SIT SO BADLY--

--TAKE THIS TABLE WITH MY REGARDS!

CRASH!

WHAT A BLOW! 'TWAS WORTHY OF AN OLYMPIAN **GIANT!** 'TWOULD SEEM THY STATURE IS NOT THY **MEASURE**, WOLVERINE.

TRULY, THIS HAS BEEN A CLASH OF **TITANS.**

SHEATHE THY CLAWS. THY VALOR HAS PROVEN THEE A WORTHY COMPANION. THERE SHALL BE NO MORE FIGHTING THIS NIGHT.

YOU COPPIN' OUT, BUB?

'TIS TIME TO **DRINK** AND CAROUSE! JOIN ME, LITTLE LION! WE'LL RAISE A FLAGON OF ALE TO THIS GLORIOUS COMBAT!

JUST LIKE THAT? ALL OVER?

'TWOULD BE FOLLY TO CONTINUE THE BATTLE. THOU HAST PROVEN THY METTLE, AND HERCULES CRAVES NO VICTORY O'ER A MORTAL.

WHAT THE HECK? IT WAS A GOOD FIGHT. THAT'S ALL I REALLY WANTED.

SPOKEN LIKE A WARRIOR BORN!

YA KNOW, HERC, I GOTTA TELL YA, WHEN I WENT OUT LOOKIN' FOR **SKIRTS** TONIGHT, I WAS HOPIN' FOR A FEW WITH **DAMES** IN 'EM.

SO, WHAT SAY WE...

...*Hunh?* WHAT'S GOIN' ON HERE? AW, **CRIPES!**

ZOUNDS! WHERE WENT THE REVELERS? WHAT BECAME OF THE WENCHES?

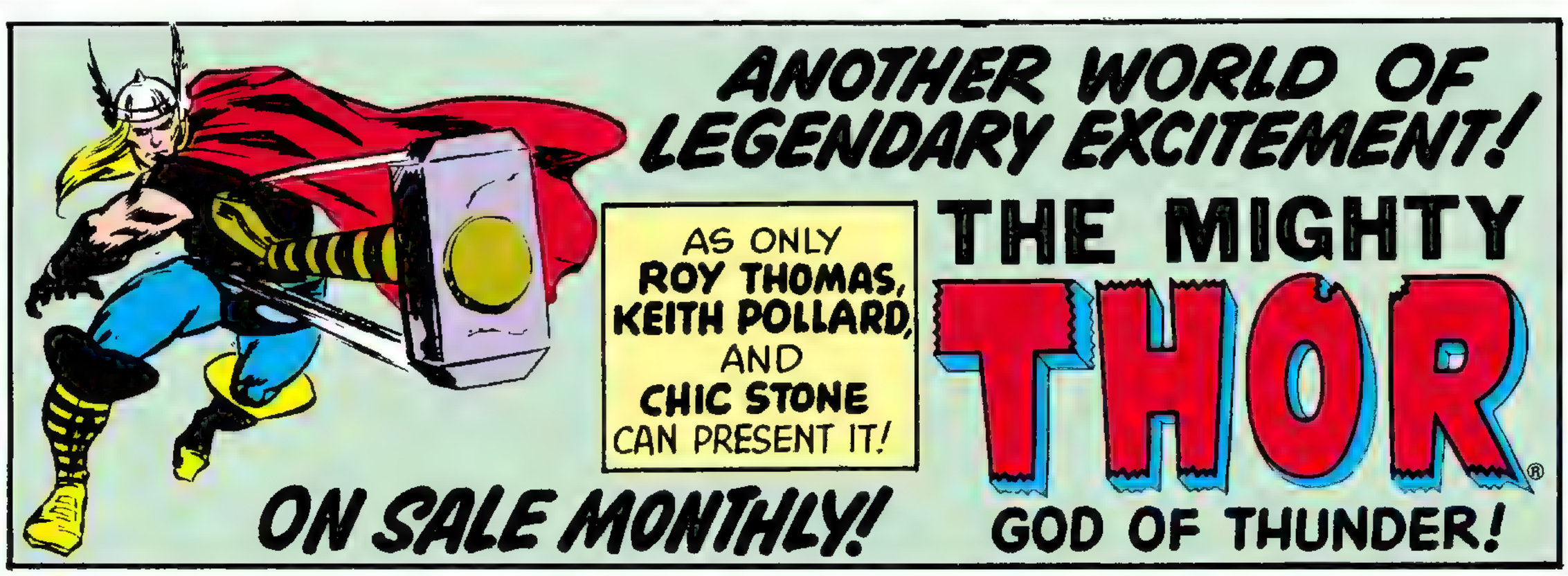
DUMB YOKELS CAN'T EVEN APPRECIATE A LITTLE BIT A' ACTION.

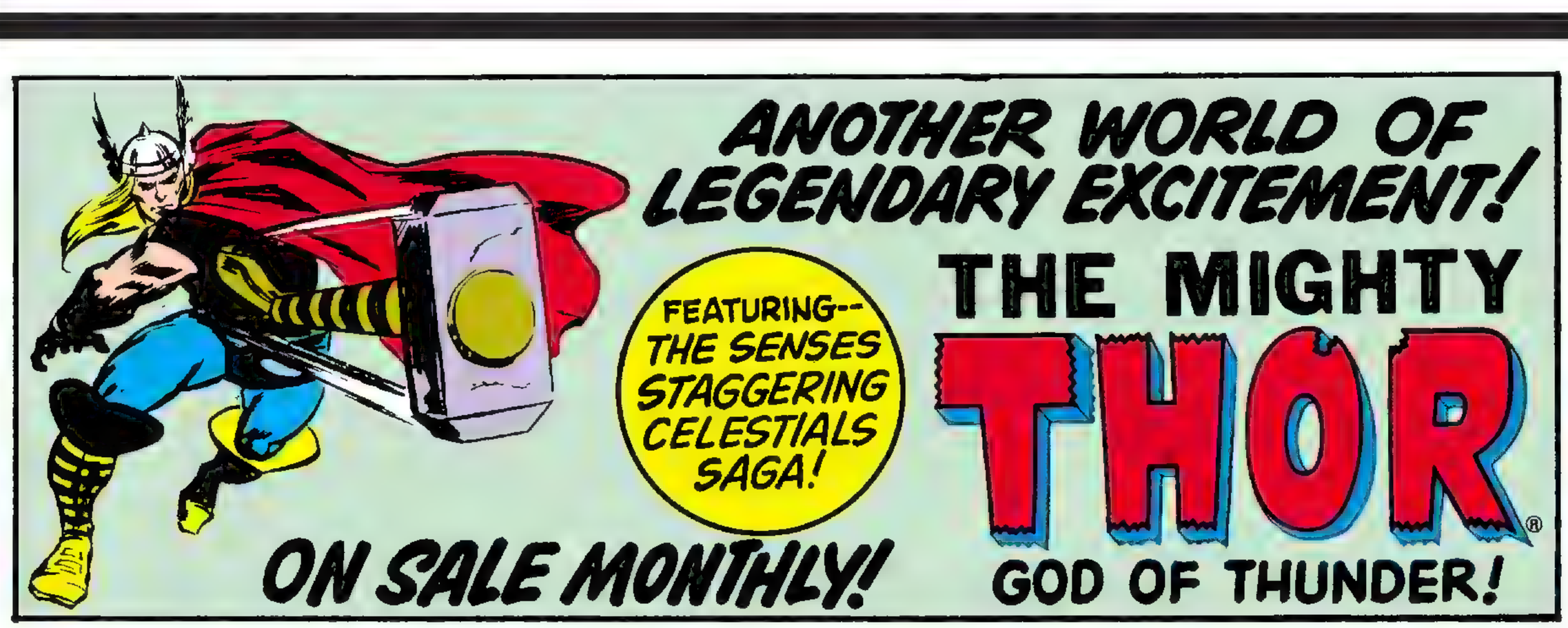
ΞSighΞ WOULD THAT THERE'D BEEN AN AUDIENCE, FOR 'TWAS A GLORIOUS FIGHT.

AW... SHUDDUP AN' PASS THE PEANUTS.

FIN

This *The Mighty Thor* house ad first ran in November 1979 titles and then was updated to tout the ongoing Celestials Saga for July 1980 titles after Roy Thomas' depature as series writer.


ANOTHER WORLD OF LEGENDARY EXCITEMENT!
AS ONLY ROY THOMAS, KEITH POLLARD, AND CHIC STONE CAN PRESENT IT!
THE MIGHTY THOR®
GOD OF THUNDER!
ON SALE MONTHLY!


ANOTHER WORLD OF LEGENDARY EXCITEMENT!
FEATURING-- THE SENSES STAGGERING CELESTIALS SAGA!
THE MIGHTY THOR®
GOD OF THUNDER!
ON SALE MONTHLY!

The Mighty Thor #294 editorial
by Mark Gruenwald

THE HAMMER STRIKES

c/o MARVEL COMICS GROUP
575 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10022

ROY THOMAS
EDITOR
MARK GRUENWALD
ASSISTANT EDITOR

SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY NOTE: As mentioned in a footnote in this selfsame issue, much of the current THOR storyline has been influenced by the conception of a "god's cycle," utilizing the Zodiac and its procession across the heavens and tying it in with Asgard, Ragnarok, and various other factors yet to be revealed. Thus, we deemed it appropriate to have assistant editor Mark Gruenwald, who touched off these elements with an important article in his quality fanzine *Omniverse*, explain such things further, rather than merely attempting to paraphrase him. Of course, Roy and Keith hope to have a few things left up their sleeves to surprise even Mark, but to say that his original fanzine article was influential upon recent issue of THOR would be to understate the case. From here on, though, we'll let Mark tell it in his own words...

——Roy T.

This issue of THOR and last introduce a number of new concepts about Marvel mythology, chief among which is that Ragnarok — the Twilight of the Gods foretold in legend — is *not* a one-time-only, end-of-the-world event, but rather a cyclical occurrence denoting cosmic time.

Actually, this is a concept that has been hinted at before in the pages of THOR, as well as in the body of Norse mythology which is the source material upon which this series is based.

Hark back to the epic tale told by Stan Lee in THOR #200, "Beware if this be Ragnarok!" Here we are given a sweeping glimpse of what Ragnarok means to the Asgardians. The prophetess Volla gives an account of the inevitable doomsday ordained for Asgard, and concludes with these words: "Naught shall remain of the golden realm, save a fiery, flaming ember — a smoldering celestial cinder in the fabric of eternity. But time rolls on without beginning and with no end. The centuries turn to ages, the ages to eons, and the world shall cool, and new land shall rise from beneath the restless seas. And, as it ever was — and as ever it must be — new life shall come a'borning and gods shall rise again."

From this we learn that Ragnarok is not the final end of all things, but rather the end of an age, from which the seed of a new age and new gods shall one day flourish.

If the Asgard we know is the predecessor for the next age of gods, might it too have a predecessor? Might the gods' cycle of life and death have already been in progress *before* the age of the Asgardians chronicled in the pages of THOR? In the just-cited words of Volla: "...as it *ever* was..."

One of the things that has perturbed mythology buffs among us since the first time Thor was revealed to be a true legendary god and not some mere approximation, is why the Marvel-Earth Thor did not more accurately resemble the Thor of Norse myth.

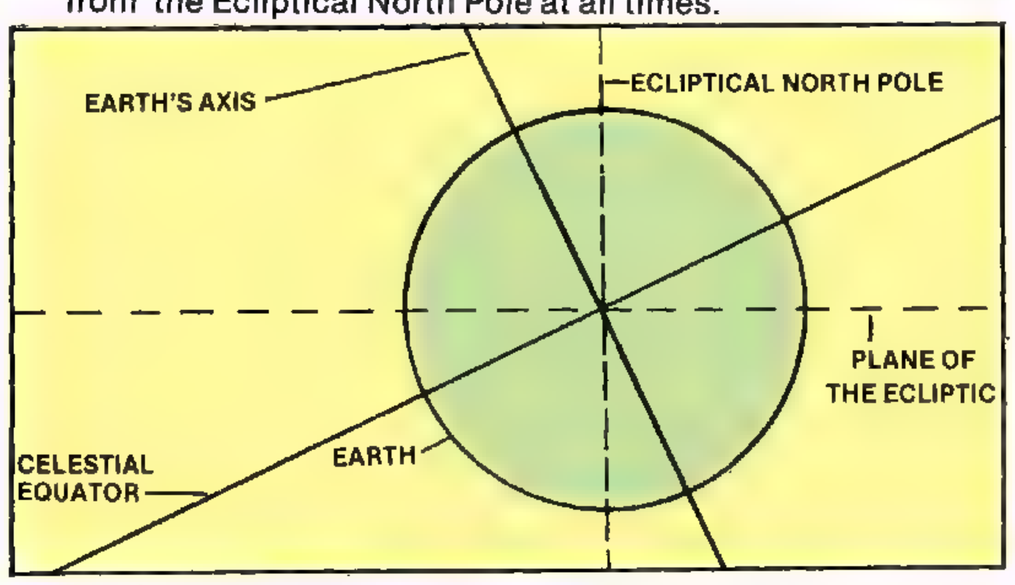
In Norse mythology, Thor had red hair and a beard rather than golden locks and a clean-shaven face. The dissimilarities did not end with Thor. In myth, Sif is described as having gold-spun tresses rather than raven-black hair. Mimir is described as a water-spirit into which Odin cast his eye to gain omniscience, while Marvel's Mimir is a fire-spirit into which Odin cast his eye to learn of Ragnarok's imminence. Further examples could be cited, but we trust you already get the point.

What with the revelation of a cyclical Ragnarok, we now know the reason for these discrepancies. There are *two* generations of gods: the Asgardians of the current age, and the Aesir of the previous age. It is the Aesir who are described in the accounts of Norse mythology on both Marvel-Earth and our own. This solution denies neither the Norse mythos nor the Lee-Kirby mythos, but instead assigns each its rightful place in the Marvel Universe.

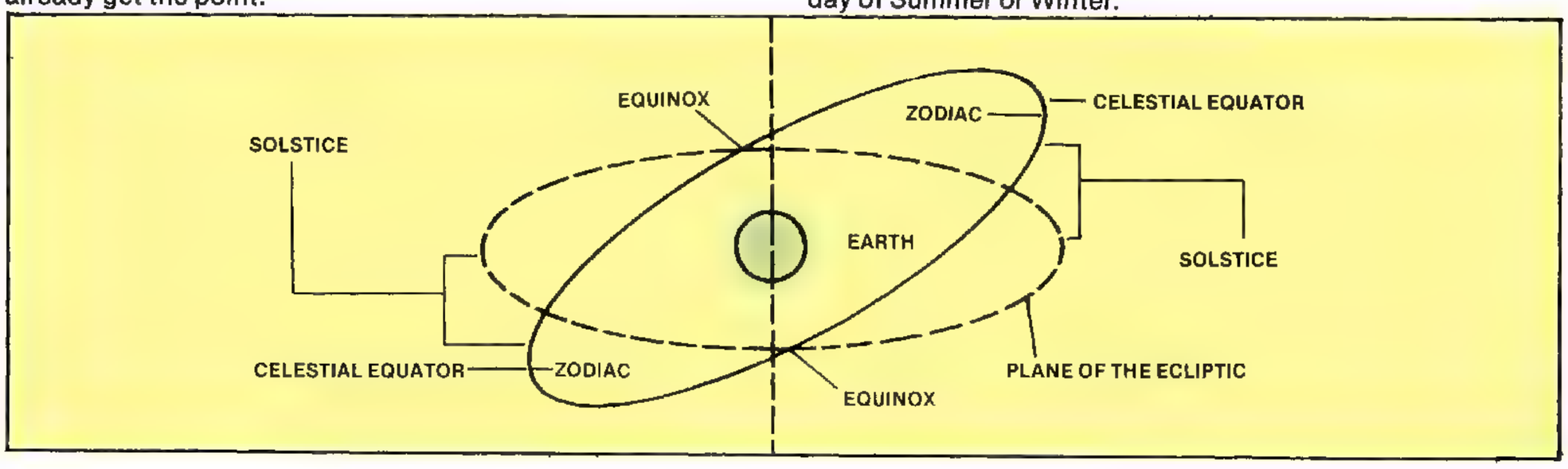
Now that you know some of the *why* behind the Godcycle Scenario, we will attempt to explain some of the *how*. To do this, we must enter the realm of astronomy.

Since the time of the ancients, it has been observed that the planetary body called Earth makes three major different kinds of motion in space: *rotation,* the spinning around the imaginary pole called the axis which takes 24 hours to complete one cycle; *revolution,* the orbiting of the sun which takes 365¼ days to complete; and *precession,* the gradual turning of the Earth's axis which takes 26,000 years. It is this last kind of motion that has to do with Cosmic Time, and relates to the cycle of Ragnaroks.

In the first diagram below is a circle representing the Earth. The dotted horizontal line marked the *Plane of the Ecliptic* is an imaginary plane which encompasses the orbits of virtually all the planets of the Solar System. The dotted vertical line intersecting the Plane of the Ecliptic at right angles is marked the *Ecliptical North Pole.* The solid line tilted slightly away from the Ecliptical North Pole is the *Earth's Axis,* the imaginary pole around which the Earth rotates. It is tilted 23¼ degrees from the Ecliptical North Pole. The solid line that is at right angles to the Earth's Axis is the *Celestial Equator,* an imaginary plane that extends outward into space from the Earth's equator. The diagram illustrates that the Earth's axis is tilted 23¼ degrees from the Ecliptical North Pole at all times.



On page two of this issue's tale there is an illustration of the Celestial Equator divided into twelve equal areas, each corresponding to a constellation of stars as seen from Earth. These twelve constellations are called the *Zodiac.* In the second diagram below we see that the Ecliptic intersects the Celestial Equator at two points which are called the *Equinoxes.* The two points at which the circles are farthest apart are the *Solstices.* When the sun appears to rise in the constellation that is at the Equinox positions, we have the first day of Spring or Fall. When the sun appears to rise in the constellations of the Solstice, we have the first day of Summer or Winter.



The ancients noticed that the constellation that the sun appeared to rise in on the first day of Spring every year was very gradually moving. Over centuries of observations they learned that every 2160 years the sun will have moved 1/12 its way around the circle of the Zodiac, and hence would rise in a different constellation of the Zodiac.

Why? Because of the Earth's third type of movement, precession. With the Earth's axis gradually wobbling around in a circle 23¼ degrees from the North Celestial Pole, all the constellations of the Zodiac appeared to be moving, or precessing. The ancients named the age after the constellation the sun rose in on the first day of Spring. Presently we are in the waning Age of Pisces, moving into the Age of Aquarius. Each constellation has its turn at naming the age for 2160 years.

On Marvel-Earth, where the gods of myth are literally real, the precession of the Celestial Axis (the extension of Earth's Axis in both directions) affects the lives of the gods in a very real way. The destinies of the Asgardians are inextricably bound to the Celestial Axis which is manifested in Asgard by *Yggdrasil*, the World-Tree. Every 2160 years when the Celestial Axis has assumed a new orientation, the old age dies and a new one is born.

The transition between ages is Ragnarok, the Twilight of the Gods. Ragnarok is a regular, cyclical event that no man or god can forestall or hasten.

If, all this time, the date of Ragnarok has been immovably placed some 150 or so years in the future, why have the gods of Asgard on numerous occasions been concerned about its premature arrival (notably, in THOR #154-157, 184-188, 198, 249-250, and 274-278)? Don't they *know* when it is destined to occur, and that nothing short of moving the very heavens could hasten its arrival? As a matter of fact, as suggested this issue, they *don't* know; Odin, who we learn is the embodiment of the survivors of the last age, knows the true nature of Ragnarok, perhaps —but if so, he is keeping the knowledge to himself for the foreseeable present. Why he does so — and why he once fashioned the awesome Odinsword as a temptation to those who would see Ragnarok fall before its appointed hour — are mysteries to be answered, Roy assures us, in the near future.

And so, the dawn of the Asgardians occurred around the first year A.D., as the Age of Aries gave way to the Ages of Pisces. The next Ragnarok will occur around 2160 A.D., at which time the Age of Pisces will have been supplanted by the Age of Aquarius. What new gods there may be in the Age of Aquarius cannot yet be told, but their destiny is written... in the stars.

For more detailed information about the gods' cycle of existence, see "From Ragnarok to Apokolips," by Mark Gruenwald in **Omniverse: The Journal of Fictional Reality,** issue 2, available for $2.25 from Alternity Enterprise, 211 W. 88th St., Suite 3A, New York, N.Y. 10024. Tell 'em Marvel sent you.

LIKE TALES OF DARK SORCERY AND SWASHBUCKLING ACTION?
THEN DON'T MISS A SINGLE THRILLING ISSUE OF
CONAN
THE BARBARIAN
AND ITS $1.25 COMPANION MAG,
THE SAVAGE SWORD of CONAN
THE BARBARIAN
ON SALE MONTHLY!
STUNNING SAGAS OF ALTERNATE MARVEL UNIVERSES
AS TOLD BY THE WATCHER!
IN EVERY DOUBLE-SIZED ISSUE OF WHAT IF!™

The Mighty Thor #298, page 7 original art
by Keith Pollard & Chic Stone

NOW SHALL I STRIKE WHILE HAVING GAINED FAVORED POSITION... NOW SHALL *NEEDFUL* DRINK DEEPLY-- ***HALVING*** YOUR SIGHT!

RRRAAAHHH!

AWAY, NOISOME FLEA! YOUR INFERNAL BOASTING VEXES ME MORE THAN THE LOSS OF A HUNDRED EYES COULD!

KKRRAACHH!

OHHH...WOULD THAT ALL WHO OPPOSED ME IN THE PAST DID BATTLE WITH THE FEROCITY OF FAFNIR. BUT NOW HE IS FLED--AND WITH HIM, WHATEVER CHANCE OF BECOMING A WARRIOR IN BODY AND SOUL.

BUT HOLD--A DARK SHADOW FROM ABOVE PASSES OVER ME, BLOTTING OUT THE SUN! COULD IT BE--

FAFNIR RETURNS, CURSED ONE! DOES THE UNHOLY VISION OF MY DRIPPING SIGHTLESS EYE AT LAST FILL YOU WITH LOATHING--AND ***FEAR***?! DO YOU KNOW ITS TRUE MEANING AS YOU GAZE UPON ME?!

Courtesy HeritageAuctions.com

The Mighty Thor #298, page 8 original art
by Keith Pollard & Chic Stone

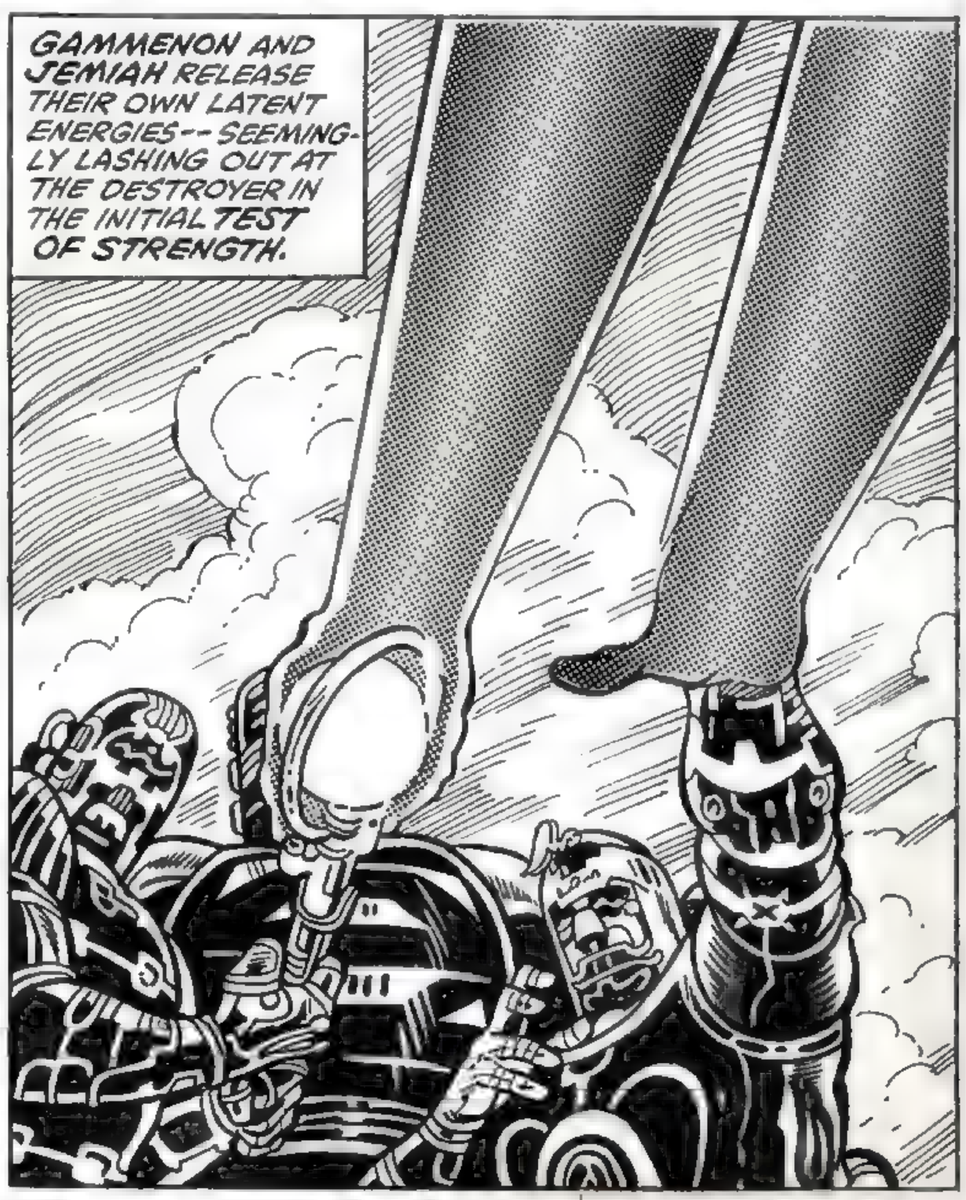
298
14
NAY-- NAY, MONSTER! IT DOES NOT! I FEEL ONLY ANGER AT ONE WHO TAUNTS ME-- WHO SOUGHT TO DECEIVE ME AND PREVENT MY ASCENSION TO WARRIOR-HOOD!
BUT IF I CANNOT WREST THE SECRET OF FEAR FROM YOUR SNARLING LIPS THEN I SHALL AT LEAST BE CERTAIN THAT YOU WILL NOT LIVE TO SPEAK IN MOCKING TONES OF YOUR ILL-CONCEIVED VICTORY.
YYYRRRGGHH!
HO, DRAGON! YOUR SOFT UNDERBELLY IN-VITES A HARDY THRUST! NEEDFUL HAS FOUND ITS MARK IN THE HEART BEHIND YOUR HEAVING BREAST.
YOUR SLAVERING JAWS HAVE RENT THEIR LAST VICTIM. BY MY HAND DO YOU DIE THIS DAY!
NO!! NOT LIKE THIS, BLONDHAIR! NOT IN THIS FALSE FORM WILL I PERISH AND ROT! NEVER!
WHOOUUFF!
E'EN IN HIS DEATH THROES, THE BEAST IS POSSESSED OF MIGHT ENOUGH TO HURL E'EN ME AWAY!

Courtesy HeritageAuctions.com

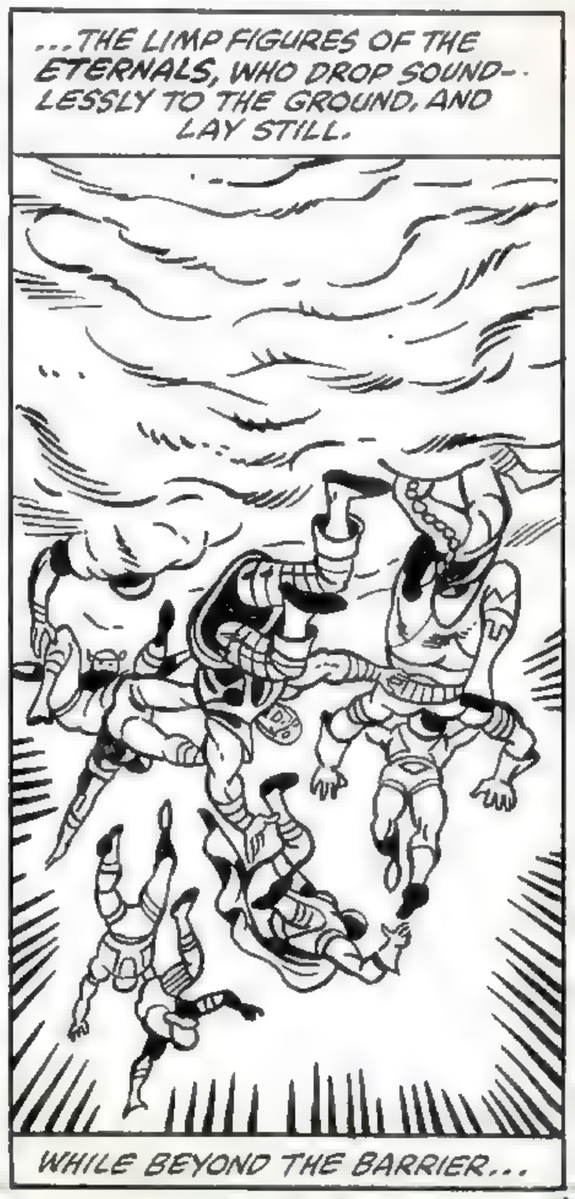
The Mighty Thor #300, page 26 original art
by Keith Pollard & Gene Day

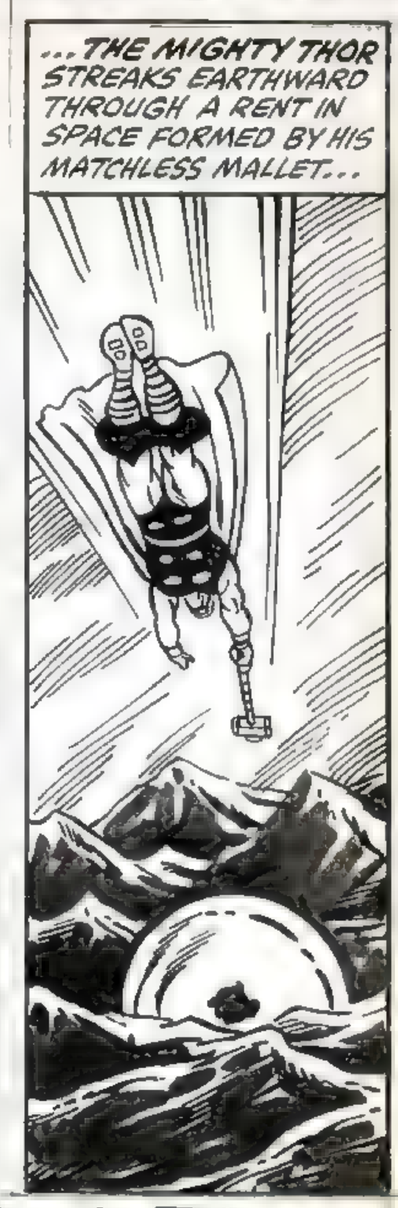
THE CELESTIALS FACE THEIR ADVERSARY WITH EQUANIMITY, FOR NEVER HAS THEIR WILL BEEN THWARTED... NEVER THE CHALLENGER NOT BEEN CRUSHED.

THE ODINSWORD GLOWS GOLDEN WITH THE ENCHANTED POWER OF THE LONG-DORMANT RHINE-GOLD FROM WHICH IT WAS FORGED.
AND NOT IN ALL LIFE OR LEGEND HAS THE MERGING OF WEAPON AND WIELDER BEEN MORE PERFECT...THE UNITY MORE COMPLETE.


GAMMENON AND JEMIAH RELEASE THEIR OWN LATENT ENERGIES -- SEEMINGLY LASHING OUT AT THE DESTROYER IN THE INITIAL TEST OF STRENGTH.

BUT IT IS THE UNI-MIND TOWARD WHICH THE SPACE GODS HAVE AIMED. TWIN BLASTS STRIKE AS ONE, AND THE LEVITATING ENTITY SPLITS INTO ITS COMPONENT ELEMENTS...





GENE DAY

Courtesy HeritageAuctions.com

The Mighty Thor #302, page 1 color guide
by George Roussos

When DR. DONALD BLAKE strikes his wooden walking-stick upon the ground, it becomes the mystic hammer MJOLNIR—and the lame physician is transformed into the Norse God of Thunder, Master of the Storm, Lord of the Living Lightning—and heir to the throne of eternal Asgard....

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR!®

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO KILL!

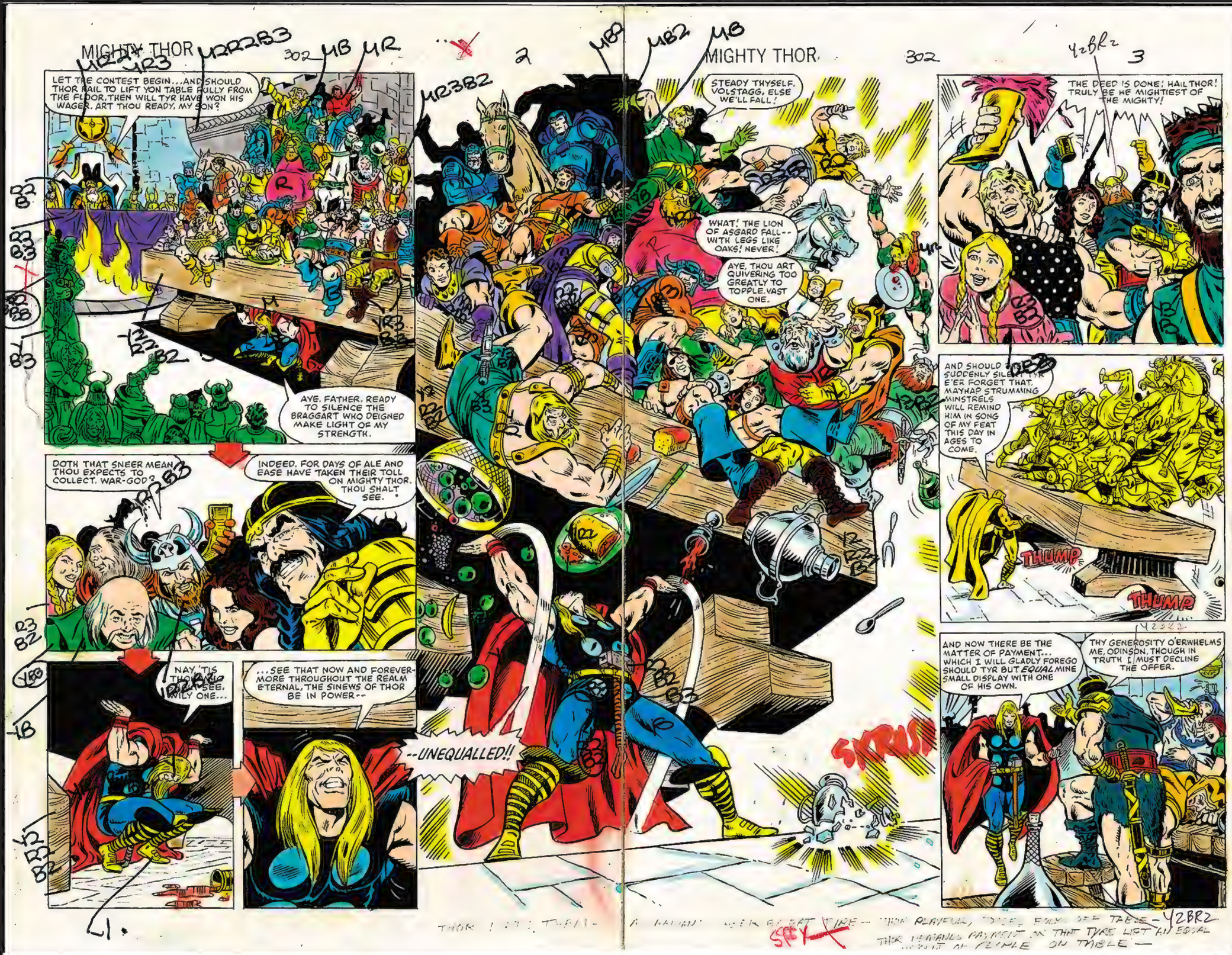
FOR NINE DAYS AND NIGHTS HAVE THE FESTIVITIES REIGNED IN THE PALACE [illegible]. RAGNAROK, THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS HAS PASSED AND ASGARD ENDURES--ITS PEOPLE LONGER UNDER THE DREADED CURSE WHICH FORETOLD THEIR DEMISE.

AND AMONG THOSE MOST IN THE MOOD FOR MERRIMENT IS THOR, SON OF LORD ODIN, WHO TAKES HIS LEISURE IN A MOST UNIQUE MANNER.

THOU HAST ISSUED THE CHALLENGE, TYR, AND THOR DOTH ACCEPT. NOW NEED I ONLY THE WORD OF MY SIRE TO SHOW THEE THE FOLLY OF THY WAYS, FATHER?

MARK GRUENWALD & RALPH MACCHIO — WRITERS
KEITH POLLARD & CHIC STONE — ARTISTS
JOE ROSEN — LETTERER
GEORGE ROUSSOS — COLORIST
JIM SALICRUP — EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER — EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Courtesy HeritageAuctions.com


MIGHTY THOR
302
LET THE CONTEST BEGIN...AND SHOULD THOR FAIL TO LIFT YON TABLE FULLY FROM THE FLOOR, THEN WILL TYR HAVE WON HIS WAGER. ART THOU READY, MY SON?
AYE, FATHER. READY TO SILENCE THE BRAGGART WHO DEIGNED MAKE LIGHT OF MY STRENGTH.
DOTH THAT SNEER MEAN THOU EXPECTS TO COLLECT, WAR-GOD?
INDEED. FOR DAYS OF ALE AND EASE HAVE TAKEN THEIR TOLL ON MIGHTY THOR. THOU SHALT SEE.
NAY, 'TIS THOR WHO SHALL SEE, WILY ONE...
...SEE THAT NOW AND FOREVERMORE THROUGHOUT THE REALM ETERNAL, THE SINEWS OF THOR BE IN POWER--
--UNEQUALLED!!
STEADY THYSELF, VOLSTAGG, ELSE WE'LL FALL!
WHAT! THE LION OF ASGARD FALL-- WITH LEGS LIKE OAKS! NEVER!
AYE, THOU ART QUIVERING TOO GREATLY TO TOPPLE, VAST ONE.
THE DEED IS DONE! HAIL THOR! TRULY BE HE MIGHTIEST OF THE MIGHTY!
AND SHOULD SUDDENLY SILE... E'ER FORGET THAT, MAYHAP STRUMMING MINSTRELS WILL REMIND HIM IN SONG OF MY FEAT THIS DAY IN AGES TO COME.
THUMP
THUMP
AND NOW THERE BE THE MATTER OF PAYMENT... WHICH I WILL GLADLY FOREGO SHOULD TYR BUT *EQUAL* MINE SMALL DISPLAY WITH ONE OF HIS OWN.
THY GENEROSITY O'ERWHELMS ME, ODINSON, THOUGH IN TRUTH I MUST DECLINE THE OFFER.

Courtesy HeritageAuctions.com

BIOGRAPHIES

ROY THOMAS

Along with fellow fan Jerry Bails, Roy Thomas developed the first known organized comic fandom in the pages of *Alter Ego*, a self-published fanzine. Leaving his teaching position in 1965, Roy took his deep knowledge of comics characters and their history and moved to New York City, accepting a job under DC Comics editor Mort Weisinger. His stay lasted little over a week before he opted for a position at Marvel, where under Stan Lee, his duties quickly matured from proofreading to more serious work as an editorial assistant and writer.

Titles as disparate as *Modeling With Millie*, *Kid Colt* and *Sgt. Fury* were written under his auspices before he was able to fulfill his desire to write super-hero stories on Iron Man in *Tales of Suspense* #73 and a pair of Dr. Strange stories for *Strange Tales*.

Stan must have liked what he was reading, because after this seeming trial period, Roy "The Boy" (as he was called in credits) was given both *Sgt. Fury* and *The X-Men*. Along with artist Werner Roth, Thomas took the X-Men on adventures around the world and told the characters' pre-X-Men origins. In addition to introducing Banshee, Sunfire and Havok, Thomas' X-Men credits also include his watershed collaboration with artist Neal Adams.

Proving his mettle on *X-Men* led him to *The Avengers*, and it was with this team that Roy really started crafting his legacy. Across 70 consecutive issues of Earth's Mightiest Heroes, he became perhaps the title's definitive writer, introducing characters such as the Vision and penning classic sagas including the "Kree/Skrull War." Before the '60s ended, Thomas chalked up noteworthy runs as writer of *Doctor Strange*, *Sub-Mariner*, *Captain Marvel* and more.

In the '70s, Thomas' influence at Marvel widened to include the first adaptation of Robert E. Howard's *Conan the Barbarian*, a reinvention of Adam Warlock, and a new super-team, The Defenders. By 1972 Roy was selected to succeed Stan Lee as editor in chief. His tenure as EIC lasted for over two years before he returned to his writer/editor role on *Fantastic Four*, *Thor*, *Savage Sword of Conan*, *What If...?* and *The Invaders*.

In 1980, he left the House of Ideas for DC to pursue a lifelong dream by reviving the Justice Society of America in the pages of *All-Star Squadron*. He wrote many more comics for DC and Marvel over the next two decades and is still active today, writing comics, historical studies, adaptations of classic novels and publishing his award-winning *Alter Ego*. Thomas' career contributions were acknowledged with his induction into the Eisner Hall of Fame's 2011 class. He lives in South Carolina with his wife and collaborator, Dann, and an amazing menagerie of animals that must make the neighbors nervous.

KEITH POLLARD

One of its most high-profile artists in the late '70s and early '80s, Keith Pollard's tenure at Marvel was notable for his sleek, refined renderings of the company's most iconic characters. He broke in at Marvel in 1974, drawing such characters as Deathlok in *Astonishing Tales*, Shang-Chi in *Master of Kung Fu*, and the super-hero action of *Black Goliath*, *Ms. Marvel*, and Black Panther in *Jungle Action*. After a stint on the black-and-white *Rampaging Hulk* magazine, Pollard was ushered into the starting lineup of creators on three of Marvel's flagship titles.

Starting in 1978, Pollard provided breakdown art on *Fantastic Four* for the legendary Joe Sinnott to finish. Soon after landing his *FF* gig, he began penciling *The Amazing Spider-Man* and then took the reins from "Big" John Buscema on *Thor*, starting a run that would encompass the epic "Eternals Saga" storyline. All in all, Pollard's hand guided the visuals of these three prime Marvel titles simultaneously, and his tenures on each book are memorable additions to each title's legacy.

In the early '80s, Pollard took on a new stable of heroes at DC, drawing several issues of *Green Lantern* and launching *The Vigilante* with writer Marv Wolfman. He returned to regular series work at Marvel in 1989, once again drawing *Fantastic Four*. By 1995, Pollard retired from comics, although he is currently appearing at conventions and doing commissioned art for his fans.

MARK GRUENWALD

Few can lay claim to the influence that Mark Gruenwald had on Marvel as an editor, writer and artist during the 1980s and '90s. Born in 1953 in Wisconsin, Gruenwald's love of comics manifested in a fanzine titled *Omniverse*, which led to writing articles for the DC-published fanzine *Amazing World of DC Comics*. In 1978, he was hired by Jim Shooter to serve as an assistant editor at Marvel. In addition, Gruenwald also scripted several titles. He was ongoing writer of *Spider-Woman* in 1978-79, he kicked off a long run co-scripting *Marvel Two-In-One* with the "Project Pegasus" arc, and he co-wrote a handful of stories in *What If?* and *Thor*. Early in his career, Gruenwald also penciled a number of titles, including issues of *Questprobe*, *Incredible Hulk* and *Marvel Team-Up*. His major art credit was drawing the 1983 *Hawkeye* miniseries, which he also scripted.

A well-known continuity hound and office jokester, Gruenwald gave T-shirts emblazoned with the catchphrase "Continuity or Bust" to his office peers. His deep love of the Marvel mythos didn't stop with T-shirts. As a writer, he delved deep into Marvel's past with his "Untold Tales of the Marvel Universe" backup stories in *What If?*, as well as the secret origin of the High Evolutionary in the 1989 "Evolutionary War" event. Gruenwald's biggest achievement in grappling with the encyclopedic history of Marvel was his development of *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe*, a series compiling the backgrounds of virtually every Marvel character. Eager fans devoured *OHOTMU*, and the series' success led to multiple sequels and updates that continue today.

Gruenwald's biggest accomplishment as a writer came with *Captain America*, a title which he wrote for an astonishing 137-issue run from 1985-1995. He also kicked off long runs on *Quasar* and the New Universe title *D.P. 7*. His critically acclaimed magnum opus, *Squadron Supreme*, a 12-issue miniseries, reestablished the alternate-reality Marvel team.

When Tom DeFalco was named editor in chief in 1988, Gruenwald became his second-in-command with the title of executive editor. As an editor, he worked closely to mentor young writers, bringing an unforgettable sense of fun to the deadline slog. Tragically, Gruenwald passed away in 1996 due to an unknown heart ailment. In his will, he requested his ashes be mixed with ink used in the first printing of the *Squadron Supreme* trade paperback.

RALPH MACCHIO

Comics seemed to surround Ralph Macchio's life: His uncle was DC art legend Wayne Boring; his Cresskill, New Jersey, hometown doubled as the fictional comic book home of Ant-Man and the Wasp; and one of his youthful pastimes was writing letters to his favorite comic books. However, after graduating with a degree in English Literature, Macchio seemed poised to work for Macray, his family's moving company. An encounter with writer Don McGregor at a comic book convention pulled Macchio into Marvel's orbit. Regular visits to the Marvel office ensued, which in turn led to writing assignments for Marvel's in-house fanzine *F.O.O.M.*, and, by 1976, a position as an assistant editor.

Macchio wrote several titles early in his career, most notably *Thor* and *Marvel Two-In-One*, which he co-scripted with Mark Gruenwald, the latter title including the classic "Project Pegasus" storyline. He also wrote a six-issue *Solomon Kane* limited series and teamed with artist George Pérez for the Black Widow "Web of Intrigue" arc in *Marvel Fanfare*. But unlike many writers who jumped from editorial to freelance writing careers, Macchio decided he preferred the camaraderie of the Bullpen and the creative possibilities of involvement in every aspect of a book's production.

Major highlights of his distinguished editorial career include *Daredevil*—particularly Frank Miller's "Born Again," *The Man Without Fear*, and *Elektra Lives Again*—Walter Simonson's *Thor*, Doug Moench and Bill Sienkiewicz's *Moon Knight*, righting the Spider-Man franchise from the destabilizing "Clone Saga," the launch of the Ultimate Universe, and adaptations of Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* and *The Stand*. Macchio is just as well known for fostering new editors and countless interns, including future editor-in-chief Bob Harras and fan favorite artist Joe Madureira. He also kept a spirit of fun alive and well in the Marvel Bullpen through years of practical jokes. Macchio retired from Marvel in 2011 with an editorial tenure second only to Stan Lee.

JO DUFFY

Like a lot of fans who would later turn pro, Jo Duffy first gained notice at Marvel by writing countless letters to her favorite comics. Her ardent fandom was memorialized in a 1977 issue of *Iron Man*, in which she was depicted in a throng of autograph hounds at San Diego Comic-Con. She was hired at Marvel that same year by then-Editor in Chief Archie Goodwin as a proofreader, but would soon work her way up the editorial ranks, presiding over titles including *Doctor Strange*, *ROM*, *Savage She-Hulk* and *Daredevil*, which coincided with the arrival of Frank Miller as penciler. Miller described Duffy as his "guardian angel," mentoring him as an artist and writer. In 1982, Duffy would join Goodwin for the launch of Marvel's creator-owned Epic imprint, where she helped launch Steve Englehart and Steve Leialoha's *Coyote* and Jim Starlin's *Dreadstar*. An ardent fan of manga, Duffy spent years lobbying to bring Japanese titles to Marvel, and in 1988 it paid off with Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira*. This seminal, long-running series opened the door to the North American market for manga, and Duffy herself adapted the scripts. Among Duffy's other writing credits were long stints on *Star Wars* and *Power Man and Iron Fist*, the mutant miniseries *Fallen Angels*, the toy tie-in series *The Saga of Crystar: Crystal Warrior* and several issues of *Speedball* and *Wolverine*. She also wrote the graphic novel *The Punisher: Assassin's Guild*. At DC, she scripted a pair of Batman stories and wrote the first fourteen issues of the 1993 *Catwoman* series. In 2002, Duffy teamed with Kurt Busiek to script the series *The Order*, which reunited the classic lineup of the Defenders.

KEN LANDGRAF

Born in 1950 in Wisconsin, Ken Landgraf developed an early love of comic books that manifested in his own precocious self-publishing pursuits, churning out comics with names like *Crimestopper Monthly* and *Vampire Kiss*. He received letters of encouragement from heroes like Steve Ditko and Joe Kubert, and he even got Ditko to draw a cover to one of his comics. After graduating high school, Landgraf served in the navy in the Vietnam War, then joined the Navy Reserve after his return home. He headed to New York City to pursue his artistic ambitions, attending the School of Visual Arts and assisting artists Howard Nostrand, Gil Kane and Rich Buckler. He set up a studio in New York City with fellow artists Armando Gil and Dave Simons, doing all manner of commercial- and publishing-related artwork. His professional comic book breakthrough came in 1977 with DC, where he drew several installments of the Flamebird and Nightwing backup in *Superman Family*, a Hawkman backup in *World's Finest Comics* and penciled or inked several stories for the horror anthology *Ghosts*. In 1980, he picked up an assignment with Marvel on a Hercules/Wolverine team-up that was published in *Marvel Treasury Edition* #26. Hearkening back to his adolescent pastimes, Landgraf took a risk and started up a publishing company of his own in the '80s, producing the five-issue series *Starfighters* as well as *Rock Comics*, a one-issue tabloid-sized merging of his loves of comics and rock and roll, which featured an artistic contribution from Neal Adams. Of late, Landgraf has storyboarded for TV and film, illustrated children's books and conceptualized several drawing books.

RICARDO VILLAMONTE

Peruvian artist Ricardo Villamonte got his start in comics at Skywald illustrating tales for *Scream* and *Psycho*. At DC, he co-created the sword-and-sorcery title *Beowulf* with writer Michael Uslan, and illustrated its six-issue run. Villamonte's penciling credits for Marvel include issues of *Doctor Strange*, *The Transformers*, *The Further Adventures of Indiana Jones* and *The Saga of Crystar, Crystal Warrior*. His extensive inking credits included *The Human Fly*, *John Carter, Warlord of Mars*, *King Conan*, and *Power Man and Iron Fist*. In 1988, Villamonte illustrated a series of Edgar Allan Poe adaptations for Eternity Comics, his last published work in the comics industry.

Biographies researched and written by John Rhett Thomas

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THE GOLDEN AGE

As the Great Depression wore on and the specter of war hung over America, a new storytelling medium was born: the comic book. Within their four-color pages, larger-than-life super heroes could make short work of America's foes, giving readers of all ages hope for victory against the real-life enemies that faced the United States. At the forefront of this new medium was Timely Comics, a young company staffed by such legendary creators as Carl Burgos, Bill Everett, Joe Simon, Jack Kirby and Stan Lee. These trailblazing talents birthed a vast array of characters that would give rise to the Marvel Universe!

GOLDEN AGE ALL-WINNERS VOLS. 1-4
GOLDEN AGE CAPTAIN AMERICA VOLS. 1-6
GOLDEN AGE DARING MYSTERY VOLS. 1-2
GOLDEN AGE HUMAN TORCH VOLS. 1-3
GOLDEN AGE MARVEL COMICS VOLS. 1-7
GOLDEN AGE MYSTIC COMICS VOL. 1
GOLDEN AGE SUB-MARINER VOLS. 1-3
GOLDEN AGE U.S.A. COMICS VOLS. 1-2
GOLDEN AGE YOUNG ALLIES VOLS. 1-2

THE ATLAS ERA

Seeing super heroes waning, Timely Comics evolved into Atlas Comics and took on a vast new range of genres: science-fiction tales of outer space adventures; realistic war comics; buxom jungle heroines; horror comics that would become the center of a moral panic that rocked the industry; and romance comics for the emerging teen audience. Even the classic costumed heroes of the Golden Age retooled to take on the threat of Communism. From Western gunfighters to crime to horror, the Atlas Era had it all!

ATLAS ERA BATTLEFIELD VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA BLACK KNIGHT/YELLOW CLAW VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA HEROES VOLS. 1-3
ATLAS ERA JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA JUNGLE ADVENTURE VOLS. 1-3
ATLAS ERA MENACE VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA STRANGE TALES VOLS. 1-6
ATLAS ERA TALES TO ASTONISH VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA TALES OF SUSPENSE VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA VENUS VOL. 1

THE MARVEL AGE

In August 1961, change hit newsstands: *The Fantastic Four* #1 did not feature the squeaky-clean heroes of yesteryear. They were real characters placed in extraordinary circumstances. They lived together, they fought among themselves — and sometimes, they even lost to the bad guys. This was more than a change in attitude: It was the beginning of something entirely different — the beginning of the Marvel Age of Comics!

Thanks to the fertile imaginations of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko and others, an unending list of heroes followed the FF with ever-increasing acclaim and popularity: the Amazing Spider-Man, the Mighty Thor, the Incredible Hulk, Daredevil, Iron Man and the X-Men, to name but a few. These were the Marvel heroes, born of conflict and a continuous struggle to balance human lives with superhuman responsibilities.

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN VOLS. 1-21
ANT-MAN/GIANT-MAN VOLS. 1-3
THE AVENGERS VOLS. 1-19
THE BLACK PANTHER VOLS. 1-2
CAPTAIN AMERICA VOLS. 1-11
CAPTAIN MARVEL VOLS. 1-6
THE CHAMPIONS VOL. 1
DAREDEVIL VOLS. 1-13
DEATHLOK VOL. 1
THE DEFENDERS VOLS. 1-6
DOCTOR STRANGE VOLS. 1-9
THE FANTASTIC FOUR VOLS. 1-21
GHOST RIDER VOL. 1
THE HUMAN TORCH VOLS. 1-2
THE INCREDIBLE HULK VOLS. 1-13
THE INHUMANS VOLS. 1-2
THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN VOLS. 1-12
IRON FIST VOLS. 1-2
KA-ZAR VOLS. 1-2
KILLRAVEN VOL. 1
LUKE CAGE VOLS. 1-3
MARVEL RARITIES VOL. 1
MARVEL TEAM-UP VOLS. 1-4
MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE VOLS. 1-4
THE MIGHTY THOR VOLS. 1-19
MS. MARVEL VOLS. 1-2
NICK FURY, AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D. VOLS. 1-3
NOT BRAND ECHH VOL. 1
RAWHIDE KID VOLS. 1-2
THE SAVAGE SHE-HULK VOLS. 1-2
SGT. FURY VOLS. 1-4
THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN VOLS. 1-2
SPIDER-WOMAN VOL. 1
THE SILVER SURFER VOLS. 1-2
THE SUB-MARINER VOLS. 1-8
WARLOCK VOLS. 1-2
THE X-MEN VOLS. 1-8
THE UNCANNY X-MEN VOLS. 1-11

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